

figure skates and hockey blades

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/28399290) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/28399290>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Video Blogging RPF
Relationship:	Clay Dream/GeorgeNotFound (Video Blogging RPF)
Character:	Clay Dream (Video Blogging RPF) , GeorgeNotFound (Video Blogging RPF) , Sapnap (Video Blogging RPF) , Dream SMP Ensemble
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - College/University , Alternate Universe - Skating , Ice Skating , Skating , Alternate Universe - Hockey , Hockey , Identity Reveal , Fluff , Banter , Hockey Player Clay Dream (Video Blogging RPF) , Figure Skater GeorgeNotFound (Video Blogging RPF) , Alternate Universe - Sports , Sports , Fluff and Humor , Light Angst , Alternate Universe - Canada
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2020-12-29 Completed: 2022-06-22 Chapters: 15/15 Words: 54000

figure skates and hockey blades

by [effervescentlies](#)

Summary

George is a talented figure skater who moves from England to Canada on a scholarship.

Dream is the rowdy captain of the university hockey team. Unbeknownst to George, he's also Clay, an exceptionally bright and mysterious English major.

But what George doesn't know won't hurt him, right?

roommates and new friends

Chapter Notes

please be aware that like some aspects of hockey and figure skating are glamorized for the sake of writing lol. i had to take a little artistic license!!!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

If George knew moving across the world was going to be this difficult, perhaps he wouldn't have considered it at all.

He's standing on the steps of his new home for the next few years — a sturdy, towering building constructed with large pale bricks and ornate carvings — lugging a heavy, black suitcase with a backpack slung across his shoulders. Surrounding the building is a well-kept lawn and century-old trees, proudly providing shade to the groups of students huddled in their shadows.

Just to the left of the heavy oak doors leading within the building is a glimmering golden plaque that reads *Amana Hall*. George looks down at his welcome package, a mess of multi-coloured papers gripped tight in his right arm, and pulls out the sheet indicating which residence he's supposed to be living in. This is the right place; his residence, his home away from home for the rest of his university life.

In his efforts to slide the paper back into the stack, a pamphlet falls to the ground with a light *smack*. As George bends down to pick it up, his eyes gloss over its cover. There's an image of an elegant figure skater in the middle of her routine, the spotlight above her illuminating the turquoise sparkles of her outfit. *Northern University Figure Skating Club*, the title reads, and the corners of George's mouth twitch up a little.

This is why he's here in Canada, why he transferred to this terrifying new school in the first place.

At the age of five, George went on the ice for the very first time bundled up in a puffy blue jacket on a snowy December evening. At the age of seven, he pressed his face up to the plexiglass at his local ice rink after his weekly skating lessons and watched the figure skaters practice their routines, gliding, leaping, and twirling across the ice.

At the age of thirteen, George was one of those figure skaters.

George sets the pamphlet neatly on top of the stack and grips the door to the building, swinging it open and dragging himself and his hulking suitcase inside. He's meant to be sharing a room with someone in room 316, and after a quick glance at the hall's directory, George knows exactly where to go.

The door to George's dorm room is faded and worn, a testament to the old age of the university, but the brass numbers on it unmistakably read *316*. With a deep breath, George reaches a shaky hand out towards the door handle.

A gust of air blows George's neat brown hair to the side as the door swings open with force — he's greeted with the surprised face of another man in front of him. His eyes gloss over George's face, and George watches as the other runs a hand through his hair. His shocked expression quickly

morphs to one of realization.

"You must be my new roommate," the man says, holding out a hand. "I was wondering when you were arriving. I'm Sapnap."

George shakes his hand. "I'm George."

Sapnap steps aside to let him in, holding the door wide open for George to pull his suitcase in behind him. The dorm is, as George expected, small. To the right of the entrance is a small complete bathroom, and to the left is a closet the two roommates are meant to share. In the main area of the dorm are two twin beds and two wooden desks, a bed and desk occupying each side of the room. The left side's clearly been lived in for a while now; the plain grey comforter on the bed is bunched up by the foot of the bed, and the desk is covered in various notes and stationery. Above the bed is an unfamiliar flag that covers part of the yellow-tinted wall.

"Yeah, sorry about the mess. That's just my side though, so you'll be sleeping here," Sapnap says, pointing to the right side of the room. "Do you need any help unpacking?"

George sets his suitcase down on the floor with a *thud* and struggles to unzip it. The suitcase is packed to the brim, the zipper pulled tight, to the point where George wouldn't be surprised if it spontaneously exploded. "Yeah, actually, thanks."

Sapnap nods and crosses the room. "Where are you from?" he asks innocently.

"London," George replies, pulling out his bedsheets. "England."

"England to Canada," Sapnap marvels, astonished. "Why'd you move?"

"I was offered a scholarship here for my figure skating," says George, smiling slightly, a light laugh peeking behind his words. He pulls out a pair of impeccably clean, creamy white figure skates from his suitcase. Blue skate guards shield the blades from nicks and scratches. Sapnap nods in understanding.

George continues. "I was supposed to transfer here last week on the first day of classes like everyone else, but things got mixed up at the airport. What about you?" he asks, partly out of politeness, partly out of a genuine interest.

Sapnap grins as he jabs a thumb back at the flag above his bed, illuminated by the morning sunlight streaming in through the window on the back wall. "Texas, baby. Best state in the world. I moved up north to play hockey and study computer science."

"Oh, me too," George says, surprised, putting his skates down with care. "I'm studying computer science too, I mean."

It's awkward between them, as all George's new friendships are. Predictably, after spending most of his teenage years either diligently practicing his figure skating or hunched over lines of code on his computer, he isn't the best at making friends.

Luckily, Sapnap simply ignores George's nervousness and surges forward, itching to make friends with his new roommate.

"Dude, let me see your schedule. Do we have any classes together?"

George heads to his desk and fumbles with the welcome package until he sees his schedule. "Uh, it's right here," he answers, handing the flimsy paper over to Sapnap.

Sapnap's eyes light up as he skims over the paper. "We've got algebra together! It's the first class of the day and it starts in like an hour, so we need to hurry. I'll take you there. This place is kinda confusing if you don't know where you're going."

George nods and quickens his pace, shoving his toiletries into the bathroom and his school supplies into his backpack with Sapnap's help. By the time he's done unpacking, the clock announces that they've only got about fifteen minutes to spare before class starts.

"Algebra's ridiculously boring," declares Sapnap as the pair briskly walk to the lecture hall. "But maybe you'll find it interesting, I don't know."

George grins and takes a moment to think. "I think I like algebra," he replies. The path to the lecture hall is, luckily, short — following the winding cobblestone paths and wrought iron lampposts, it's just a few minutes away from their dorm.

"You're weird," says Sapnap, lightly punching George's shoulder playfully. "That's weird."

Before George gets a chance to respond, they're already staring at the entrance to the lecture hall. Sapnap holds the door open for him and gestures for him to go inside.

"After you," he says.

Algebra wasn't nearly as boring as Sapnap had expressed it was. Perhaps that was a result of George spending the entire class confused at what he had missed and furiously jotting down reminders for himself to re-read the course syllabus, because *clearly* he had missed something.

The two roommates are sitting at a small table outside of one of the many dining halls scattered across campus. An umbrella overhead shields them from the sun and a gentle breeze sweeps through, occasionally cooling them from the early September heat. Empty paper plates and plastic cutlery are stacked atop lunch trays shoved to the side.

Sapnap points his much too short pencil down at George's notebook. "So here, you don't want to look at what's in the brackets yet. Try —"

A tanned hand claps down on Sapnap's shoulder, who visibly jolts with surprise. "Sapnap!"

Sapnap whips around with a smile on his face. "Clay!" he exclaims, and shifts aside to make room for the new arrival.

"Hi," greets Clay, sliding onto the bench. He tilts his head slightly in confusion. "Who're you?"

"I'm George," he says, reaching a hand over the table. "I'm Sapnap's new roommate. I just moved here."

Clay shakes George's hand politely, yet with a firm grip. He's wearing the university's hoodie, branded with the school's name and lion mascot, and his tawny hair is nearly long enough to reach the tops of his ears.

"It's nice to meet you," Clay says once their hands have broken apart.

George smiles politely. "You too," he affirms.

Clay looks down at George's papers and frowns. "Algebra?"

"Yeah, I missed the first week of classes so Sapnap's just trying to help me catch up."

Clay spins the notebook to get a better look and frowns. “Well, I mean you *could* do it that way, but it’s way quicker if you just—”

“Oh *shut up*,” groans Sapnap in a terrible imitation of an English accent. “You’re such a smartass.”

George raises an eyebrow. “You’re studying computer science too?”

Clay purses his lips and twiddles with a pen in his hand as he stares down at George’s work. “No, English. Creative writing. I used to do a lot of coding and took a lot of classes in high school though, so I know a lot about computer science already.”

George’s eyes widen and he bites his lower lip in thought. He’d spent most of his education at the ice rink, sat in the stands before practice writing his English essays by hand or reviewing his lessons in physics before the next day’s unit test. For him, taking extra classes was out of the question.

“Here,” says Clay, spinning the book back around. “Don’t listen to this idiot, he probably knows less than you do. What you’re meant to do here is—”

“You are such a smartass,” Sapnap interjects, “actually such a smartass. Look at me, I’m Clay, I know *everything*. Give it to me,” he orders, snatching the pen out of Clay’s grasp.

The rest of lunch flies by in a flurry of note-taking, laughter, and a great deal of bickering. Before George knows it, it’s a quarter past one and he’s got to go to his programming course.

George dumps his trash into a nearby bin and sets his tray on top. “I’ll see you guys around. Thanks for helping me with my work and all that,” he tells Sapnap and Clay, who are standing nearby waiting.

Waving goodbye perhaps a bit too enthusiastically, George heads down the path and sighs as he remembers his class schedule. An avalanche of classes and coursework is waiting for him just a few moments ahead.

This is going to be a long day.

“Holy *shit*, I’m finally done,” George breathes out, slumping over his desk and running his hands through his hair. He’s spent the past five hours holed up in his room trying to catch up on his work, and it’s finally paid off.

“Congratulations,” voices Sapnap from across the room. He’s lounging on his bed, reading a zombie apocalypse comic of some sorts.

George sours. “How did you finish all your work so fast?”

Sapnap pushes his comic down to get a good look at George, who’s resting his chin on the desk and staring at Sapnap with begrudging eyes. “Work faster,” Sapnap says, flipping his comic back up and covering his face.

A groan escapes George’s lips as he stretches in his seat, grabbing the back of his desk chair. “Whatever,” he sighs, “I’m going out.”

“Out where?”

“Ice rink,” answers George, getting up to grab his skating bag from the closet where he’d stored it earlier.

“It’s ten at night,” Sapnap says. “The rink’s open, but like — aren’t you tired?”

George waves a hand of dismissal. “It’s fine. I’ve skated later than this before.” He throws a dark crewneck on and heads to the bathroom to change his jeans out for black thermal pants. “I’ll be back later,” he says, one hand on the doorknob, the other tightly grasping the strap of his duffle bag.

“You better not wake me up when you get back,” Sapnap calls out as George shuts the door behind him.

The ice rink is chilly and George can nearly see his breath when he exhales, but it feels like home.

His skating bag is wide open next to him on the bleachers, a pair skate guards thrown somewhere inside. George is hunched over, expertly lacing up his skates from muscle memory. He flexes his feet, checking for comfort and security before standing up and stretching his stiff muscles in preparation.

George hasn’t skated in a little over a week, what with all the stress and excitement from moving, which is far too long for his liking. Back in England, he was on the ice nearly every day of the week, committing his routines to memory and perfecting his jumps.

He steps out onto the ice confidently and closes the gate behind him, which sounds out with a loud bang. This ice rink is a bit smaller than he’s used to and is covered in bright markings — it is shared with the hockey team, after all — but it still feels familiar nonetheless.

Overhead, bright lights shine onto the shimmering ice. George’s pale cheeks flush pink with the cold as he starts gliding across the ice, doing quick laps around the edge of the rink. His legs fall into a steady rhythm of left and right, back and forth, speeding him up.

It’s freeing; the feeling of the cold air whizzing past George’s face as he practices his smooth footwork across the ice, the feeling of weightlessness as he leaps into a simple toe loop jump, the feeling of euphoria when his skate’s blade hits the ice and he lands perfectly, gliding away.

George is grinning wildly now, confident and cocky in his abilities. He can almost hear music in his ears, blaring the songs he’s done his favourite routines to. Humming, he skates into a step sequence, the sound of his skates hitting the ice in time with the melody in his head.

The song starts building, getting more and more intense by the second. George shifts, lifting his right leg to effortlessly launch himself into a treacherous axel jump.

He’s spinning mid-air in slow-motion, completing one, two, *three* whole rotations, the music roaring in his head reaching its crescendo, when a loud *bang* distracts him from his jump. George turns his body towards the sound instinctively, and before he knows it his right toe pick has caught the surface of the ice and he stumbles, landing sprawled across the ground.

Pain courses through his body, at first numbing and cooling from the ice, then severe and jolting. George can hear another loud bang, the sound of the rink’s gate closing, and the swish of blades across the ice moving closer towards him. Picking himself up off the ground, he gets a good look at the source of the noise.

There’s a man in a bright sage green hockey jersey, bright white helmet, and heavy-looking black

hockey skates quickly making his way across the ice with a long wooden hockey stick in hand. As George dusts himself off, the man stops sharply just inches away from him, sending bits of ice flying across the rink.

“You ruined my triple axel,” grumbles George, his legs aching in pain. “Those are so hard to land, I — I’ve never landed one before and I nearly just did.”

“Sorry about that,” says the hockey player, scratching the back of his neck awkwardly. His voice is slightly muffled by his helmet. “Are you okay?”

“I mean, I’ll bruise, but I’ll be fine.”

The hockey player laughs, but his smile’s impossible to be seen. George peers up curiously at the man’s helmet. It’s a clean white all the way around, save for a few scratches, but the face shield which is normally a clear plastic is tinted a dark black.

“I saw you land that other jump though,” the man starts, “and I saw you doing those steps. You’re really, really good.”

George smiles, all teeth, the corners of his eyes crinkling up slightly. “Wanna see me do it again?”

The hockey player nods, and George skates forward towards the center of the rink. He starts on the back outside edge of his right foot and launches himself into the toe loop jump again, twirling in the air and landing on the opposite foot.

George skates back over to the hockey player, who’s clapping at the display, and does loops around him. The back of the hockey jersey spells out *DREAM* in big, blocky white letters above the number twelve.

“Dream? That’s your last name?” asks George, coming to a stop in front of him.

“It’s more of a nickname, really,” says the man, fiddling with his hockey stick. “Everyone on the hockey team calls me that when we’re on the ice.”

George blinks. “Can I call you that?”

Dream smiles under his helmet. “Yeah, of course you can,” he says, then clears his throat, “I’m guessing you’re part of the figure skating club?”

“I am,” George says, “I just moved here today. My name’s George.” He rolls his sleeve up and offers an ice cold hand.

Dream hesitates, and there’s a moment of confusion where George thinks he’s just going to leave him hanging. Then, slowly, he pulls off one of his gloves and reciprocates the handshake with a loose grip but a warm hand, despite the cold.

“Dream,” he says, slow and reluctant. “I’m normally here at night practicing drills by myself.”

“What kind of drills?”

“Stuff like stick handling and working with the puck,” Dream throws his hockey stick back and forth between his hands, a pendulum in time with his heartbeat.

George nods despite not fully understanding. “We can share for tonight. I’ll take this side, you’ll take the other?”

Dream gives a quick thumbs-up and the two split apart to their respective sides. George decides to avoid the triple axel for the rest of the day and to instead focus on his Salchow, while Dream puts a few sticks on the ground and expertly maneuvers himself and his puck around them.

The puck slides across the ice in circles, pushed by the force of his hockey stick. Dream hums, barely looking at his puck anymore as he watches George from across the rink; he's practicing the same jump over and over, beaming wide when he lands it just right and cursing quietly to himself when he doesn't complete enough revolutions in the air.

It's a little past eleven at night when George has to stifle a yawn in the middle of his sit spin and decides it's best he heads home.

"You're leaving?" says Dream, his voice echoing slightly through the rink.

"I'm just getting a bit tired," says George, undoing his laces. "And I've got to wake up early for class tomorrow."

"Oh," Dream voices. "I'll see you around then,"

George's skates are now carefully wiped down and with their guards covering the blades and stored safely in his duffle bag. With a smile and a wave goodbye, he turns and opens the door to leave.

"See you around."

Chapter End Notes

this fic idea has been in the back of my brain for days so i finally sat down and wrote it! i got the inspiration from a [hockey boy dream fanart](#) i saw on twitter by [shtbexan](#) (go check out their art, it's gorgeous) and a [figure skater versus hockey player tiktok](#) i saw on my fyp out of chance.

please lmk if there are any inaccuracies with the figure skating / hockey stuff in the fic and i will change accordingly!!

this is my ao3 debut so i hope it's okay! i'll be honest and say that this is my first time writing anything creative in a very very long time. hopefully you enjoyed, and if you did please leave a kudos or comment -- it'd make my day! :]

biographies and hockey practice

Chapter Summary

“I can’t hear you very well under the helmet. Why don’t you just take it off?”

“If I take off my helmet, George, I lose all of my mysterious hockey boy persona.”

Chapter Notes

i'd like to preface this chapter by thanking you guys for your support on the first chapter! the number of kudos and comments blew me away. i really wasn't expecting much attention when i uploaded this fic, so thank you guys so much <3

enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“You look like shit,” says Sapnap. He reaches out a hand and sharply pokes George’s shoulder with his index finger.

George winces and rubs at his eyes, his sclera tinted pink and his eyelids a faint purple-brown. “I’m tired. And sore. So — stop poking me, Sapnap!” His voice raises to a slight shout, attracting the attention of other similarly exhausted, half-asleep students.

Sapnap draws his hand back from where he was repeatedly jabbing at George’s arm. “I was waking you up!”

It’s somewhat early in the morning — that time period that’s somewhere in between sunrise and the few hours before noon where skipping breakfast is socially acceptable. The sun’s a little over halfway up the sky, streaming the morning light into the large glass windows of the dining hall. Students are gradually filling up empty chairs and tables, slowly sipping at fragrant coffee and shoving breakfast into their mouths in apathy.

George dangles his fork over his plate, pushing his breakfast sausage around. They’re mediocre — charred and somehow oily yet dry at the same time. “If I could, I’d never take another morning class again.”

Sapnap takes a long sip of orange juice with one hand and scrolls on his laptop’s trackpad with the other. “Why didn’t you then?”

George thinks back to last night. “I need time to practice in the evenings. It’s either wake up *insanely* early to practice before class or practice at night. And if I show up to practice as tired as I am right now I’d probably fail all my jumps, so...” He trails off and rubs at his knee, a messy patchwork of purple and blue bruises hidden under the fabric of his jeans.

“Speaking of practice,” Sapnap cracks his knuckles. “I have a meeting with my professor at lunch

and hockey practice tonight, so you're gonna have to find a new buddy or something.”

George shrugs. “That’s fine. I was probably just going to finish my homework and rest or something. My first day of official practice is tomorrow.” He sweeps the remainders of his breakfast into his mouth and follows it with a sip of apple juice.

“What do you even *do* at figure skating practice?” Sapnap asks.

Huffing, George retorts, “What do you even do at *hockey* practice? Push shit around with a stick?”

“Yeah, yeah.”

At exactly twelve forty-five in the afternoon, George is browsing the shelves at Willis Library, swiping his fingers over the spines of book after book. Occasionally, one catches his eye and he’ll pull it off the shelf, give it a once-over, then slide it back into its original position with annoyance.

Willis Library is a grand old thing — multiple stories with towering mahogany bookshelves filled with everything from practically ancient tomes to novels hot off the press by young new authors. On the third story, George can look down over the balcony and see row after row of wooden study desks in the heart of the library. When he looks up, ornate white columns hold up the ceiling, high and arching and free.

George is sweeping the shelves for a book to read, one that’s simple enough for him to understand while complex enough to analyze. That is, until he can hear the sound of fabric rustling, and a tall figure casts a shadow over him.

Clay steps up next to George cautiously. “Hi,” he says, eyes trained at the same spot George is looking. They’re in front of a selection of non-fiction books — biographies, to be exact.

George turns his head. “Oh,” he says, then smiles. “Hello. Nice to see you again.”

Clay freezes for a moment — George frowns a little in confusion — before clearing his throat loudly. The sound seeps into the shelves, embeds itself in the cracks of the faded wooden floors.

“What are you looking at biographies for?”

George sighs. “I just finished a three hour long Literary Nonfiction lecture, and now they want me to pick a biography and analyze the components of it.”

Clay raises his eyebrows. “You’re taking Literary Nonfiction?”

George turns his entire body to face Clay’s. “Yeah,” says George, “what’s wrong with that?”

“No, nothing,” Clay splutters. “I was just surprised, since you’re a computer science major and stuff.”

The wooden floor creaks lowly as George turns back towards the shelf. “It wasn’t exactly my first choice for an elective. I got last pick for course selection and they pretty much stuck me with this.”

Clay makes a noise of understanding. George steps towards the bookshelf and skims his fingers over the thick, colourful spines until he rests on one — it’s white with a simple black serif font running down the sides — and pulls it out.

Clay grins at the cover, amused. “Are you picking randomly? Or are you just picking terrible biographies just to spite me?”

George scowls and returns the book to the shelf. “You’re an English major, aren’t you?” he asks. “Have you taken Literary Nonfiction?”

“I have,” says Clay, slow and deliberate. “I took it as an elective last year.”

“What biography did you pick, then?”

“*The Sand Castle* by Julianne Cook. It’s incredible — it’s about Julianne and how she grew up from her childhood of bullying. And it’s written so perfectly and magically — it kinda reads like a fairy tale, you know? And once I started reading, I couldn’t put it down.”

To that, George scrunches up his nose and says: “Sounds boring.”

Clay opens his mouth to scoff. “Oh come on now. You haven’t even read it — or even looked at the cover or read any summaries or —”

“It’s not my fault you’re terrible at pitching books to me.”

“Look,” says Clay, and he grabs George’s arm lightly to get his attention. “I’ll help you with your biography analysis if,” he pauses, “you read *The Sand Castle* for fun.”

“What.”

“Read it for fun, then when you’re done get back to me whenever — no, get back to me in a week or two — and tell me what you thought. Think of it as *extra reading* .”

George’s face turns into something between disgusted and perplexed. “Who are you, my teacher?”

“I’m helping you with your assignment, aren’t I? I might as well be.” Clay crosses his arms and cocks his head to the side like the bastard that he is.

George rolls his eyes — subtly, but Clay catches it — and looks off to the side. “Fine. Help me pick out a biography to do my assignment on, then.”

Clay grins.

An hour later, George and Clay step out of Willis Library into the bright afternoon sun. George is in possession of three new things: a worn copy of *The Sand Castle* , a biography detailing the life of some famous figure skater, and three pages of hastily written notes on Clay’s tips and tricks on writing his analysis.

“Thank you for the help,” says George earnestly. He stops on the stone steps leading up to the library. Clay is just a few steps lower and pivots to face George.

“No problem,” Clay replies. And then, quickly, he adds, “You can pay me back later. With the book, I mean.”

George smiles. “I will fulfill my end of the bargain, as promised.” There’s the hint of a laugh hidden beneath his words, but it goes unspoken.

“When are you going to finish the book?”

“I’ll let you know when.” George fishes his phone out of his back pocket and holds it out to Clay expectantly. “Here.”

Clay cranes his neck forward. “What?”

“Your number,” explains George patiently. “So I can let you know when I’m done with your dumbass biography. And so I can text you if I need help with my dumbass analysis.”

“*When* you need help,” Clay corrects, “not if.”

George eats dinner — lasagna with a side of steamed broccoli, courtesy of the dining hall — at his desk, sitting cross-legged in his chair. He’s been poring over the pages of the figure skater biography Clay had helped him pick out for the past hour now, but he’s only about thirty pages in.

Every word he reads makes sense, logically, in his brain — but George finds himself having to go back and reread the simplest of sentences at least twice before he absorbs any valuable information. And even then, the information glimmers in his head like a dying lightbulb, fading and flickering into nonexistence. He feels like he’s merely *looking* at the words rather than truly *reading*.

He sighs and stretches out his back. His body still feels a bit sore from last night at the rink — the muscles in his back ache, a constant reminder of the masked hockey player that had caused him to fall over.

What was his name again? Dream? He’d seemed nice enough; although he was inadvertently the reason for George’s injuries, he’d complimented George on his skating and seemed perfectly happy to share the ice rink.

George yawns. Looks at the biography on his desk, looks away. Slumps his head onto his hands, cupping his face.

And just as George is about to hop out of his chair and into bed, call it a night, and put off the reading for later date — he gets the inkling of an idea.

Years of studying before and after skating practice, curled up somewhere in the stands or in the locker room, have conditioned George to unknowingly consider the *ice rink* as his ideal study spot.

He’s used to reviewing year ten chemistry terms and definitions over the booming sounds of speakers playing the same song on loop. He’s used to bringing his shitty little laptop and finishing his computer programming assignment while listening to the silver blades of figure skates scrape and slide across the ice. Hell, he’s even used to silently stressing about his upcoming exam *while on the ice*.

What he’s *not* used to is twenty raucous hockey players whooping and hollering at each other — because as it turns out, George had forgotten what Sapnap had told him about hockey practice tonight.

The commotion is apparent to George even before he opens the door leading to the rink, though it’s muffled by the heavy steel door. It’s the sound of hockey pucks shooting across the ice, skates barreling forwards, and the inevitable cheering between the players as they complete each drill.

Should he turn back? Cut his losses, head back to the dorm and fall straight into bed like he wanted to earlier? George mulls over his options, but he’s walked too far in his desperate state to return so suddenly.

When George shoves the door open, it’s no surprise that none of the hockey players notice him

over all the ruckus. So he ducks his head, pulls his hood up over tufts of dark brown hair, and slouches into one of the front row seats.

On the ice, the players take turns passing pucks to each other and sharply turning around bright pylons placed on the floor. They're shouting words of encouragement at each other, but the words carry and echo through the stadium to the point where it's difficult for George to understand. The hockey coach is standing off to the side, nodding and clapping along with praise.

George retrieves the biography from his bag and flips to the page he left off on. It takes a few minutes for him to get settled — get comfortable in the hard plastic chair, drown out all outside noise — until he's finally *reading*. Brown eyes tear across page after page and, thanks to Clay's tutorage, bright blue sticky notes are placed next to important passages and quotes.

He's just about halfway through the book when there's a loud *bang*. George jerks his head up, startled, and there in front of him is Sapnap, helmet off and grinning toothily at George through the plexiglass surrounding the ice. Practice is over — the hockey players are slowly making their way towards the gate, and Sapnap follows.

"George!" exclaims Sapnap. He's still in his skates and is wobbling slightly with each step. "Did you come to see me?"

"No," George says, scoffing playfully. "I'm reading."

"You don't have to lie, y'know," Sapnap counters. "Why are you reading *here*?"

"*I'm not lying*," insists George. "I just like it here. It keeps me focused."

There's someone else approaching from behind Sapnap — the last player to leave the rink. Clad in a jersey, white hockey pants, and black hockey skates, he's walking stiffly, almost tense, with his hockey stick in hand.

"Hello," Dream says. The smile in his voice is evident.

"Dream," George replies, surprised. "Hello again." Despite knowing of his place on the hockey team, it hadn't clicked to George until now that Dream and Sapnap were on the same team.

Sapnap looks back and forth between them. "You two know each other?"

Dream's quick to answer. "We met here yesterday."

"So *that's* why you came home so late, George." Sapnap turns back to George and rests his helmet on his hip, holding it in place with his arm.

"What?" George suppresses a laugh.

And then, unhelpfully, Dream adds: "No."

Sapnap grins. "Are you coming with us to eat, Dream? We were thinking chicken wings."

"Uh, no thanks," says Dream, shifting his weight to the other foot. "I've got stuff to do."

"Dude, you never go out with us," Sapnap complains. "Aren't you supposed to be like, the team captain and stuff? This is a great morale booster. Come boost our morale."

Dream laughs, short and sweet. "I can boost morale another time."

“Oh! Do you wanna come with us, George?” asks Sapnap, eyes bright.

George smiles. “No thanks, I already ate. And I’ve got this stupid book to finish,” he says, waving the biography around in the air for added emphasis.

Sighing, Sapnap runs his hands through his damp hair. “Whatever. I’m going to get changed,” he announces, and as he’s leaving, he calls out, “I’ll get you to come eat with us someday, Dream. You too, George.”

Dream merely shakes his head and waves once in the air. Turning back to George, he swallows. “So,” he starts, “you came back to see me?”

George rolls his eyes, smiling. “You and Sapnap are *exactly the same*. Working here is nice. It’s relaxing.”

Dream takes a seat next to George and sets his hockey stick to the side. The hockey team’s long gone — probably somewhere in the locker room bickering over which chicken place is better. “I get what you mean. I like it here too,” he says.

A beat of silence. George takes a sticky note and marks his place in the book before closing it shut. Dream shifts in the hard chair and sticks his legs out into the walkway.

“You didn’t tell me you were captain of the hockey team,” George points out.

Dream hums. “I didn’t think it was important,” he replies, then gestures towards the book in George’s lap. “You’re reading?”

“Yeah, I’ve got this one for one of my classes,” George says, and pulls out the other biography he’d borrowed from his bag. “And I’ve got this one for, uh, *extra reading* .”

“Oh,” says Dream, small and muffled under the helmet. “That’s cool.”

The second biography is returned to the bag. George frowns and tilts his head. “Aren’t you hot in that thing?” he asks, lightly tapping on the side of the white helmet.

“I’m hot *all the time* , George.”

“He— well, I didn’t mean it like *that* .”

Dream snickers again, this time louder, yet still suppressed by his headgear. His shoulders shake slightly from laughter.

“See, like that! I can’t hear you very well under the helmet. Why don’t you just take it off?” George asks in excitement.

“If I take off my helmet, George, I lose all of my mysterious hockey boy persona,” replies Dream. He’s staring at his feet outstretched in front of him, repeatedly moving them outwards in opposite directions and then back in to *thump* his skates back together.

“Mysterious hockey boy persona?” echoes George in amusement.

Dream hops up, grabbing his stick from where it’s leaning against the wall. “Yes, George, that’s me.”

“Where are you going?”

“Just because practice is over for *them* doesn’t mean it’s over for me,” answers Dream, and in a flash he’s already over at the gate, letting himself onto the ice.

George narrows his eyes, smiles slightly, shakes his head. And then he picks his book back up and continues to read, the sound of Dream’s skates ringing through the stadium.

Chapter End Notes

took me a while to grind out this chapter, sorry about that! i don't really know how often i can update since it depends on how much other work i have.

please do leave a kudos or comment if you enjoyed, they make my day! n don't forget to subscribe so u never miss an update :]

shoot and score

Chapter Summary

Dream heads left, and the defense follows to try and intercept him. He jerks around and turns right, bringing the puck around. He's tricked them; the goalie's looking left, caught off guard, and there's a golden opportunity here for Dream to take the shot —

So he takes it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Time passes by easily now that George is starting to get settled in at Northern University. His schedule's pinned to the corkboard over his desk now rather than tucked into his backpack to refer to after every class. He spends time with Sapnap during meals and in the evenings whenever he can — he spends *more* time completing his coursework at the ice rink or the comfort of his dorm room. Most importantly, George spends five days a week at figure skating practice. It goes smoothly; his teammates are nice enough and his coach has been nothing but welcoming.

Outside George and Sapnap's window is a beautiful maple enveloped in a mess of orange-yellow leaves. In the mornings, it casts a faint shadow that falls on George's sleeping form. During particularly heavy winds, spindly branches lightly tap against the window. Right now, however, the maple simply sways back and forth in the late afternoon breeze. Each gust of wind gently caresses the vibrant leaves — they're due to start falling off soon, but for now, they hang on.

The two roommates are sitting comfortably on Sapnap's bed. George sits cross-legged by the foot of the bed with his head propped up by his hands while Sapnap sits up by the head of the bed clutching his pillow. They're having a movie night at Sapnap's insistence — though George supposes that rewatching an episode of *The Office* isn't much of a movie.

"Sometimes I'll start a sentence, and I don't even know where it's going. I just hope I find it along the way." Sapnap's laptop speakers ring dialogue through the room, reverberating and bouncing off of unmade bed sheets and incomplete assignments.

George ticks up his eyebrow, nods, and says: "True."

"Shush," hisses Sapnap. "I can't hear anything over your big mouth."

"I hardly even said anything," protests George loudly. The corner of the laptop juts against his knee when he turns to face Sapnap in objection.

"Doesn't matter," retorts Sapnap. "Still annoying."

"Why're you so... mean?"

"Shut up," says Sapnap, and he whacks the pillow into George's face.

George moves to snatch the pillow from Sapnap in a feeble attempt to fight back, but he sees it coming and jerks it away. Faint particles of dust in the air whirl around with the harsh motion.

George huffs and diverts his gaze away from Sapnap's triumphant grin, back towards the show.

"You're coming to my game tomorrow, right?" Sapnap asks.

"What happened to shutting up?" quips George, and when Sapnap inevitably flips him off, he continues. "Game? Like a hockey game?"

"Obviously," drawls Sapnap. "It's just a friendly one against another university."

"I don't really know anything about hockey, though."

"You don't need to know anything," says Sapnap, and he pouts. "Please George? Please? Come to my game so you can tell me that you're proud of me?"

George grabs the pillow — Sapnap isn't expecting it this time — and returns the favour, smacking Sapnap on the back of the head with it. "You're like that kid whose dad didn't come to any of their sports games or whatever," George grumbles. "I don't want to be your dad."

"So you'll come?" Sapnap's eyes are wide and eager.

"What's in it for me, exactly?" asks George, ever the bargainer.

"The satisfaction of supporting your best and only friend here."

"You aren't my *only* friend," says George pointedly, "and you definitely aren't my *best* friend."

"I don't know about that one, George," says Sapnap, turning back towards the laptop. The characters of *The Office* are currently struggling through a terrible, pathetic conversation filled with second-hand embarrassment.

George, pitifully, looks towards the screen and feels like he's going through the same thing. This is incredibly humiliating.

He takes a deep breath. "I talk to other people here. My teammates at the figure skating club —"

"They don't count —"

— and Clay. And Dream," George finishes.

"The only thing Clay does is *tutor* you," Sapnap points out unhelpfully, "and he eats lunch with us, like, once a week. But that doesn't count either because I'm there."

George rolls his eyes lightheartedly. "You're really making me not want to come to your game anymore, you know."

"Just come. Please? It'll be fun," insists Sapnap, and when George's expression remains neutral and unchanging, he settles for: "I won't make fun of you anymore. For at least a week, maybe."

George considers this. Ideally, Sapnap would have said something along the lines of: "I won't make fun of you anymore, ever, for the rest of my life," or "You have so many friends that it's practically unbelievable."

Sapnap and George have only known each other for the better of three weeks now, but the very thought of Sapnap saying something like that is unrealistic, and George knows it. So perhaps for now, he will forfeit from this argument, begrudgingly swallow his pride, and take what he can get.

George smiles. Tilts his chin up. Raises his eyebrows, and says, “Deal.”

“How’re you feeling?”

Dream looks up from his hands, tightly clasped together and fingernails chewed short. Sapnap is standing in front of him, helmet and protective gear already equipped.

“I feel ready,” says Dream. “Confident.”

The locker room is, as always, loud and rowdy and smells like a combination of sweat and dirty ice. Through the tint of his helmet’s visor, Dream can see his teammates gearing up and chatting in preparation for the game. Bad and Ant are passionately bickering over some sort of video game while Callahan tightly secures his knee pads. In the commotion, “hype-up” music plays in the background at Punz’s insistence.

“First game of the year,” says Sapnap, lightly punching Dream in the arm. “You better be.”

“We’ve practiced a lot,” Dream replies. “I’ve seen what we can do as a team. We’re gonna crush those Warriors.”

Sapnap grins. “Hell yeah, dude. Are you gonna give one of your famous motivational speeches, or are we just going to have to live without one this time?”

Dream stands, his jersey and thick pants rustling together with the movement. Under his helmet, his gaze is determined, unfaltering, and steely. He slips on his gloves and grabs his hockey stick from next to his bag. His stick’s sturdy, yet lightweight and quick. Perfect for fast release on shots and flexible enough to withstand some wear and tear.

Dream rests the blade on top of the floor and leans in on it slightly, like a cane, as he opens his mouth to speak. Arriving at the locker room early, gearing up, delivering a rallying speech to his cherished teammates — it’s second nature to Dream, at this point.

“Alright, everyone,” begins Dream, and the timbre of his voice is enough to make everyone quiet down and turn their heads. The heavy bass of the music fades away at the end of the song, as if it’s sentient and silencing itself like the hockey team, until the only sound left is the faint swish of fabric on fabric. “First game of the year — I hope everyone’s feeling good tonight.”

A few members of the team whoop and holler, applauding as to demonstrate their excitement. Their coach claps along and shoots a thumbs up across the room. Dream smiles and shakes his head.

“We’re going up against the *Langham Warriors* tonight,” Dream announces. He stresses the opponent team’s name and spits it out like venom, all sour and pungent. “Those of you that’ve been playing with us for longer have seen firsthand how good they can be. So play fast, hard, gritty hockey. And don’t let your guard down — *never* let your guard down.”

The team nods obediently and looks up at Dream with expecting eyes, waiting for him to give the last lines of his pep talk and send the room into a surge of booming roars.

In truth, the game is meant to be a friendly, civil one. One to kick off the season and give both the Northern Lions and Langham Warriors a chance to check up on each other’s skill and new team members. But it’s the *principle* of the thing, and perhaps also a bit of Dream’s ego, that makes it so important that the Lions win this game. The two universities have been rivals for years now, since long before Dream even stepped foot onto campus, and it simply wouldn’t be right if the Lions

didn't put up their best fight for every game they play — friendly or not.

"This is *our* game. We're coming in prepared for this, and I'm confident. I have faith in all of us," Dream pauses, pointing his hockey stick around the room, "that we're going to *destroy* those stupid Warriors. They're not gonna know what hit them."

The team delves into raucous cheers, hollering and stomping hockey sticks and heavy skates against the ground. The room's buzzing and lively — electricity shoots through the air in currents, all wired up and twisty. When Dream inhales, it burns like sparks setting off inside his nostrils. Dream feels the energy all over, in his head, his veins, his heart, palpitating from adrenaline and excitement.

Their coach nods at Dream in approval, and the team starts to file out of the locker room. They're like soldiers heading off to war, all decked out in their uniforms of green jerseys and weaponry of hockey sticks. Following the orders of their commanding officer, nervous yet prepared for what's to come.

The chill that settles around Dream's body is apparent as soon as the doors to the rink swing open, filling his lungs with cool air with each breath. Upbeat pop reverberates throughout the stadium, making it feel nearly as electric as the locker room. No one is on the ice yet; the Lions are the home team, so they're the ones getting on first. Unsurprisingly, the stands are only half filled — people want a chance to see the two rival teams in action, but this game isn't quite important enough to constitute a larger crowd.

At the gate, Dream waits to the side and fist bumps each of his teammates before they skate onto the ice. It's a small, comforting gesture that brings reassurance to each player, and another one of the Lions' pre-game rituals. Dream takes care to not bump anyone too roughly; he knows that a slight injury or sore wrist could cost them the game.

Sam's the last one in line and as soon as he gets on the ice, Dream steps up behind him to get through the gate himself. Stick in hand, Dream follows the team and does laps around the edge of the rink, warming up for the game. His legs move back and forth, left then right, and he can feel his legs warming up with more blood pumping through them.

Past the plexiglass is what must be at least several hundred students and parents, most dressed in light green or dark red to represent the team they're cheering on. And then, *also* past the plexiglass on the opposite side of the rink is the Langham Warriors, gliding onto the ice with ease. They do laps around the edge themselves, skating with belligerence in a display of dominance. If Dream didn't know any better, he'd think that they were reckless. In reality, they're anything but.

All the Warriors are dressed in the same deep red uniform. Dream skates up to one player in particular with a jersey that says *TECHNO* on the back in bold letters. He's standing by the gate on the other side of the rink.

Techno turns around. "Dream," he says, voice deep and monotone.

"Techno," Dream replies. "I see you've got some freshmen on the team." Dream jerks his hockey stick back, pointing at two players clearly racing each other to complete the most laps. Their jerseys are bright and shiny and new.

"I do," Techno grins, and he gestures his arm as if to say *come with me* while he skates away, not wanting to disrupt the flow of traffic. Dream skates next to him and glides on one foot. "Tommy and Tubbo. They're kind of a dynamic duo as left and right wing forwards. You're not *ageist*, are you? Are you hating on them just because they're freshmen?"

“Ageist?” a voice blurts out from behind. Dream pivots around to see a blond boy, helmet off, gaping incredulously at him.

Techno sighs. “Put your helmet on before the game starts, Tommy,” he scolds, and the younger boy immediately squeaks out a “sorry” before scrambling to put his helmet on. Tommy skates in front of the two team captains and then turns, skating backwards to get a good look at them.

“You’re Dream! D-Money. Big D,” says Tommy, fastening his helmet. Around them, other players are whizzing by and giving the group confused looks.

Dream blinks and then winces in disgust. “Don’t call me that,” he says, and then: “You know me?”

Tommy scoffs. He slips his mouth guard off of his teeth, gnawing on it with an air of recklessness. “Of course I know you! You’re *Dream*. Everyone knows you. And you’ve quite literally got your name written all over yourself.” He gestures with his free hand to Dream’s jersey.

“*Everyone* knows me?” Dream gapes. The pop song in the background fills the gap in the conversation after his question, the singer’s pitch-perfect voice belting out lyrics passionately. There’s a twisted feeling in Dream’s chest, gnarled and suffocating.

“Oh, look at mister humble over here. Doesn’t want to admit that he’s about as famous as a university hockey team captain can be,” Techno teases, pumping his legs faster to keep up with Tommy’s brash movements. His skates hit against the ice with satisfying scrapes.

Tommy guffaws in response. “It’s fine,” he says, glancing behind him to check if he’s about to skate backwards into another player or, more embarrassingly, the wall. “After we absolutely *destroy* you in this game, no one’ll know who you are anymore.”

“Not gonna happen,” replies Dream.

Tommy skates off to catch up with Tubbo, and Techno gives a sarcastic salute to Dream before moving on himself. Dream shakes his head, dispelling the heavy feeling in his chest. He focuses back on warming up his legs, moving them across the ice in a quick rhythm, and soon he can barely feel the nippy air hurtling past him as he skates around the rink’s edge with ferocity.

The referee blows his whistle, and Dream takes his place as centre forward in the middle of the centre circle. Gives a determined nod to Sapnap at his right and Punz on his left. Looks at Techno dead in the eyes and reaches out a gloved hand for a handshake, all good sportsmanship-like.

Techno shakes his hand, because of course he does. He’s too diplomatic not to, that cocky bastard. Dream thinks, *I hate that*, but the truth is that he’d do the same thing in Techno’s position, so he hasn’t got much room to complain.

The stadium quiets as the referee holds the puck in between the two players. It’s haunting, filling everyone with anticipation. Dream furrows his eyebrows and stares down at the blade of his stick, positioned parallel to Techno’s.

The puck clatters to the ground with a *thunk*, and in Dream’s eyes time slows as he swipes his stick left to catch it. But Techno’s a millisecond faster, a cheetah to Dream’s lion, managing to get to the puck first and sending it flying towards his right.

Tommy’s hockey stick is expecting the puck and stops it, hitting it with its blade. Instantly, he’s out of position and hurtling across the red middle line to the Lions’ goal.

“Fuck,” Dream curses under his breath, racing to catch up to the puck. He wasn’t expecting to

lose the face-off, but he knows that his team can steer the game back in their favour.

Ponk and Sam are on defense, and the pair rush towards Tommy to intercept the puck. Tommy shoots it towards Tubbo, who's wide open on the left wing of the rink, but Sapnap's quicker and catches the puck in between the two forwards and pivots with force, sending bits of ice flying across the rink.

Sapnap drives the puck the opposite direction towards the opponent's attack zone. Dream follows, right down the centre line, and watches as Sapnap gets surrounded by the other team's defense and the puck gets stolen away.

The game goes lightning quick — skates on ice, hockey sticks clattering together, the puck whizzing and whirring every which way. The two teams are strong in defense: whenever the puck is getting too close to one team's goal, it isn't long before the defense is sending it towards a fellow teammate to steer away towards the opposite side of the rink. The puck's in Tubbo's possession, then Sam's, and then Techno's. Dream keeps up easily, pushing his legs across the ice and trying to stay open for a potential future pass.

Techno barrels past Punz and Dream with the puck, heading straight towards the goal and dodging Ponk and Sam expertly. Dream charges towards him, knees belt and legs shoulder-width apart, but when he's only a few meters away, Techno flicks his stick up from the right of the goal and launches the puck into a perfect parabola.

The puck rockets through the air, so fast that Dream can barely see it until it lands behind their goalie, Callahan, and into the net. Horns blare and the audience erupts into cheers. Tommy and Tubbo skate around Dream and yell something along the lines of "suck it, green boy", raising their sticks in celebration.

Dream returns to his spot at the centre circle for the face-off and calms himself. *You've got this*, he thinks to himself, breath heavy and hair sticky under his helmet. *This is your game. Bring it back.*

This time, when the referee drops the puck again, Dream's able to knock it backwards and into Ponk's possession, who promptly skates up and passes it to Punz when Tubbo attempts to corner him. Punz skates across the ice, dodging a bodycheck from Tommy, and shoots the puck back diagonally. Dream catches the pass and skates to the side, circling behind the goal, ever so aware of Techno's presence looming behind him like a shadow — and then Techno's slamming into Dream, trying to get the puck off of him.

Techno's got Dream trapped now, stuck between him and the plexiglass. Dream's helmet is pressed up and knocking against the barrier as he shoves the puck between the wall and his skate, Dream's hockey stick shoving Techno's away. The two fight over the puck until Sapnap comes and knocks it out, steering the puck back in front of the net.

Sapnap's all clear, no opponent player blocking his line of sight. He sees an opportunity here and takes it, shooting the puck into the goal. The goalie moves to block, but it proves useless — the puck ricochets off of the metal goal posts and lands far back towards the middle of the rink.

And then *fuck*, because the buzzers are going off to signal that the twenty minutes of the first period of the game are over, gone in a flash. Techno, mockingly, gives another salute to Dream before skating off to reconvene with his team. Dream scowls and turns towards the gate.

On the sidelines, the team looks concerningly dejected. This isn't a great start to the game, much less the year. Sam and a few others have got their helmets off, drying sweat off their foreheads, but Dream's helmet stays on, trapping the heat inside.

“Yikes,” voices Sapnap with a slight lisp, his mouthguard hanging between his teeth. The team doesn’t express it out loud, but Dream can tell that they’re all silently agreeing.

“Well don’t say *that*,” Dream says in disapproval. “We’ve come back from worse games from this. This is only period *one*. That was just our warm-up — we’ve still got two more periods to go. We’re bringing this back.”

Their coach claps Dream on the back and leans in to speak to the Lions in hushed tones, discussing new strategies and which players to cycle out. Sapnap and Punz are off for now, being replaced with Bad and Skeppy, while Ant takes Ponk’s place at defense.

“Remember, don’t let your guard down around these guys. And don’t let their smack talk get to you,” Dream advises as intermission ends. He’ll be caught dead before he lets one of Tommy’s stupid chants or Techno’s sardonic salutes get into his head and affect his performance.

In the second period, Dream and Techno fumble over the puck, sticks hitting each other with force, before Dream steals it away and sweeps it behind him. Bad catches the pass and flies across the ice until he’s blocked by Wilbur, one of the Warrior’s defense players, and loses the puck as Wilbur swipes it right off of Bad’s stick.

Wilbur passes to Tubbo, who scrambles across the ice to send it towards the Lions’ goal. There’s a scuffle, a bit of time where the puck flies back and forth through passes after passes and intercepts after intercepts, until Skeppy gets hold of it and passes it to Dream.

Now, Dream’s in possession of the puck, and this time he’s prepared to take a shot.

He speeds across the ice, skates hitting the ground with a fighting spirit. Dream knows that it’ll be difficult to score this goal using pure technical skill alone — hell, Techno’s skill is practically the same level as Dream’s, if not slightly better — so he’ll have to rely on his wits for this one.

Down the centre line he goes. The goalie braces in anticipation for Dream to take a shot, but the Warrior’s defense is following Dream too closely for him to get an opportunity in. Instead, he skates behind the goal. Everyone else is on the other side, waiting for Dream to skate back around.

Dream heads left, and the defense follows to try and intercept him. He jerks around and turns right, bringing the puck around. He’s tricked them; the goalie’s looking left, caught off guard, and there’s a golden opportunity here for Dream to take the shot —

So he takes it.

The puck is shot up and forward. It darts through the air like a bullet awaiting its target. Dream waits with bated breath and watches as it narrowly passes between the knee pads of the goalie.

The puck hits the back of the net, and the stadium bursts into applause. Dream beams under his helmet and sticks up both his arms to cheer, his teammates clapping him on the back.

The rest of the second period is mainly uneventful — the puck does it again, sliding back and forth from one side of the arena to the other, but never actually crossing the goal line.

“This is good,” announces Dream during intermission, panting and thirsty. “This is momentum. We need to keep this up.”

The third period begins with Tommy and Tubbo passing between each other, back and forth in an almost synchronized dance. *Techno was right*, Dream thinks, *when he said they were a dynamic duo*. Sapnap and Punz are back in this time, following the two players closely.

What's notable about the last portion of the game is this: Dream's in possession of the puck after Sapnap steals it from Tubbo and passes it over, and Dream can hear Tommy's exclamations of "what the absolute *fuck*," across the rink as Dream hurtles across the ice and into the opposing team's side of the arena. There's a loud skating noise nearby and suddenly Tommy is *right next to him*, trying to steal the puck. Tommy shoves his stick directly in Dream's path, and then Dream's falling to the ground onto the slippery, frigid ice.

The referee blows his whistle — it's a minor penalty for tripping a player with a stick — and Tommy's forced off the ice for *two whole minutes*. "It was an accident," Tommy moans, but the referee doesn't seem to care. Techno brings his hands to his face in annoyance, Tubbo cries out in worry.

The notion of the Warriors losing a player makes Dream giddy. Now, the Lions are on a power play; they've got the upper hand with one extra player.

Play resumes with another face-off right where the game paused. The Warriors win it this time and quickly send the puck across the ice. The game's not looking amazing — they're 1-1, and Dream isn't sure how much time's left in the game, but he knows there's not much left. Going into overtime is a very real possibility here.

Dream follows the puck, waiting for a chance to intercept or to catch a pass. Tubbo's got the puck, and he's looking for someone to pass to, but without Tommy there it makes things slightly more difficult. Sam wrestles the puck out of his possession and makes an attempt to pass it to Punz, but Techno glides right in between and snatches it.

Techno drives the puck towards the goal, and Callahan shifts, bracing for the puck to come flying towards him. It hits against his right glove and the puck goes right back into play. Techno missed, and he's not looking too happy about it; his gloved hands are curled around his hockey stick, looking strong enough to snap the stick in two.

Momentum, Dream thinks as he gains control of the puck, circling it with his stick. *Keep this up*, he tells himself as he passes the puck to Sapnap, wide open and ready for the catch.

Sapnap's flying across the ice, far ahead from everyone else. The Warriors surround him again, making an effort to steal the puck away, but Sapnap's too quick, too strong, too *good* this time around and manages to keep the puck on him. He skates right up next to the goal, the opponent team right on his tail.

He launches the puck up into the air and *bats it into the goal* with the blade of his hockey stick like a baseball, and it somehow *works*. The puck whizzes past the goalie's helmet and into the net. Sapnap's absolutely glowing when the horns sound yet again to signal the goal, hugging his nearest teammates in victory.

Tommy's two minutes of penalty are unfortunately over, and he makes his way back onto the ice a few seconds after the face-off. Techno immediately passes to him, and he's already got his head in the game; he's skating energetically and never loses control of the puck.

There's less than a minute left now — if the Lions can keep the puck out of the goal, they've already secured the victory. The Warriors are getting worried now, frantic and daring with their movements. Tommy races to the goal and desperately looks for an opening, a chance to tie the score and send the game into overtime, but the Lions don't let him. Defense guards Tommy closely, blocking his line of sight.

And then Tommy's somehow shooting between his legs, the puck sliding across the ice in a line

that's bound to send the game into overtime — but before the puck crosses the goal line, the buzzers resound through the stadium, deafening and booming.

The game's over — the Lions have won. They've won, they've won, they've *won*. Against the *Langham Warriors* . 2-1.

The audience rises to their feet in glee and cheers. Dream turns to Techno, who's looking slightly crestfallen, and raises his hand to his head.

He puts two fingers up. Rests them against his forehead. And, cheekily, salutes him.

“*Sapnap* ,” says George.

“George!” exclaims Sapnap. They're in the hallway outside of the locker room; Sapnap's just come out, all changed and ready to head home. “Did you see my goal?”

“I did, actually. Good job, *Sapnap*,” George replies. His tone's sarcastic, but the words are genuine. Sapnap picks up on the truthfulness behind his voice.

“Are you proud of me now?” Sapnap slings an arm around George's shoulder and grips the strap of his hockey bag with the other.

“Get off of me,” complains George, ducking under his arm. “But you know what?”

“What?”

“Maybe... I am a little proud of you,” George admits, shrugging.

“Yeah,” says Sapnap, smiling and dragging out the word. “I knew you would be. That's why I asked you to come.”

The two roommates walk down the hallway, passing white painted brick and various cork boards detailing information about the hockey team. Dark grey rubber flooring hits their feet, soft enough to avoid damage from skates yet firm enough to provide support.

George nods. “I actually liked it more than I expected,” he confesses. “It was harder to follow at first, but I think I understand now.”

Sapnap doesn't miss an opportunity to gloat, still riding high off of his victory. “Well, I'm just glad that we fucking *won* . We shit on those guys. My shot literally *changed the game* .”

George smiles, amused by Sapnap's confidence. “It did,” he agrees.

They reach the end of the hallway where there's a heavy double door leading to the lobby of the building. The walls near the door are painted green with a roaring lion promoting Northern University's beloved mascot.

Sapnap's already pushing one of the doors open, leaning on it with his side. “Let's go home.”

George shakes his head. “You go without me. I kind of want to practice.” He pats the duffle bag he's got slung across his shoulder twice, feeling the stiff material under his fingertips.

“Again?” groans Sapnap, despairingly. “What the hell, dude? Why'd you even bring your skates?”

George frowns. “I brought them *just in case* ,” he replies, “and this is just in case. I need more

practice outside of the club.”

“Whatever,” says Sapnap with a sigh. “I’m going home and going to *bed*. G’night, George.” Sapnap waves goodbye and pushes through the door. It slams shut in George’s face, delivering a cold gust of air.

George turns. Down the hallway and to the right is the door to the ice rink, imposing and painted a pretty shade of green. He walks down the hallway, bag bouncing against his left hip, and goes inside.

What he expected to see was this: bright white lights beaming down on him, deserted stands, and the ice of the rink all smoothed out and shiny from the work of the ice resurfacer. Maybe there’s a single custodian there or something, cleaning up the audience’s trash — George doesn’t know. He didn’t really think too hard about what would be behind that door when he opened it, because why would he?

Instead, he sees some jersey-wearing, hockey-stick-holding *bastard* tearing up the ice for the second time tonight.

The heavy door slams shut behind George with a *thump* and then a *click*.

Dream skates over, gliding on one foot. “George!”

“Dream,” says George, walking up to the barrier between them. His voice is loud, but not quite a yell, so that Dream can hear him through the plexiglass. “What’re you doing here?”

“I don’t know,” Dream admits. He adjusts his feet and twists his torso so he’s rotating on the spot. “What’re you doing here?”

George holds up his bag. It’s heavy, and his arms struggle a bit to keep steady. “I was going to practice. I didn’t know you’d be here,” he says, surprised.

“Lace up your skates,” says Dream. George walks towards the seats to set his bag down; on the other side of the barrier, Dream follows. “We can share again, just like last time.”

“Aren’t you tired?” asks George, unzipping the bag and taking out his skates. They’re spotless and the blades are freshly sharpened.

“A little bit. I took a break after the game, though.”

George pulls down the sleeves of his sweater, the dark blue knit covering his pale forearms. “I did watch the game,” he says, smiling. “Congratulations on securing the win.”

Dream bows down, one hand over his abdomen. “Thank you, George,” he teases. It’s evident in his voice that he’s barely containing his laughter. “I am pretty talented, if I say so myself.”

“Mm...” George hums. His eyebrows are twisted up in mock confusion, his lips pursed and screwed up in thought. “I don’t know about that one.” George unlocks the gate and steps into the rink. The air around him is cold and clear and fresh. The ice is glossy and near frictionless, save for the scratches caused by Dream.

“You can admit it, George. Just say I’m talented,” says Dream.

“I’m sorry, Dream,” George replies, not sounding very sorry at all. “I don’t think I can do that.”

“What?” Dream asks incredulously. He points down with his stick to the puck at his feet. “Okay, but this is a lot, *lot* harder than it looks. You think you can score the same goal that I did?”

“Maybe,” George replies. He’s all bark and no bite. “Too bad the hockey nets aren’t here. Otherwise I’d show you.”

“Oh I’m *sure* ,” counters Dream, sarcastic. “Next time then. We’ll see if you can do it.”

George narrows his eyes and skates in large looping circles, warming up his legs. “And you think you can land any of my figure skating jumps?”

“Well, I didn’t say *that* —”

“It’s okay, Dream,” says George as he comes to a halting stop in front of the hockey player. He widens his eyes and turns up the corners of his lips, all bright and innocent-like. “You can just admit that I’m a better skater than you.”

Dream shakes his head, and his helmet swishes against the cotton of his jersey. “Don’t you have some more jumps to practice?” he asks.

“I do, actually,” answers George, looking over his shoulder at the other side of the rink. It’s empty and polished smooth. The two halves are divided by the centre line, thick and brilliant red. “I guess we’re sharing again.”

Dream twirls his hockey stick around in his hand. “I guess we are.”

Chapter End Notes

long rant alert!! please read, there's some important info + sappy stuff !!

oh my god do any other authors struggle to go back and reread their writing because i tried reading the last two chapters i wrote and all i could think was “this is very embarrassing and not my best work” but maybe that’s just me being too harsh on myself as an author

"Sometimes I'll start a sentence, and I don't even know where it's going. I just hope I find it along the way." me writing this entire fic. this shit is capital D Difficult

funny story: while i was writing this chapter i noticed a spike in hits, comments, and kudos, so i was a little confused. i went to twitter (as you do whenever something mildly interesting happens) and saw that hockey dream figure skater george BLEW UP bc of some fanart (linked [here by codiichronicles](#)) n i was like woahhh. that is very cool.

to those of you who recommended my fic: I SEE YOU!!!! THANK YOU!!! i appreciate you more than you know

and hello to all my new readers hope u enjoy! i appreciate you so much thank u for all the support. there are 102 comments, 408 kudos, 121 bookmarks, and 2980 hits as i'm writing this. that's fucking insane!! thank you so much!

longer chapter for today to make up for the late update!! this chapter is a little bit

slower in dream & george's relationship progression than the previous chapters and is really dream-centric. but the two sharing the rink here and bantering is all part of my master plan hehe

originally, clay was going to show up at the end of this chapter and some relationship progression between clay & george was gonna happen but i decided to move that to the next one bc it just didn't fit and was a bad place to end.

oh and by the way i'll say it here: i've only ever read two chapters of one other figure skater/hockey player au so any similarities between mine and others are coincidences! and i know there are some similar fics with a similar concept, but before i posted my fic and looked in the tags i didn't even know they existed. just clearing things up bc i don't want any issues!

hopefully u guys enjoyed reading the game! i had to watch a few hours of hockey and research a bit to get a feel for the game. i thought the game might get a little boring to read at times so i tried putting some dialogue and funny bits in, like the stuff dream says between periods and when tommy got penalized. and the techno/dream dynamic was so so fun to write!

i think that's all. thank you so much for reading! please leave a comment + kudos if you enjoyed or have any questions, they make my day and i love responding to them!

coffee and assignments

Chapter Summary

George gives a little smile. “Thanks,” he says, quietly.

Dream frowns. “Is there something wrong?”

“No,” says George, lying through his teeth. And then, even more unconvincingly:

“Everything is good. I’m good.” He flexes his gloved hands, clenching and unclenching them.

Dream stares at him through his visor. “Okay,” he goes, all slow and doubtful.

Chapter Notes

thank you for 5000 hits and 600 kudos :]

everyone go check out [this fanart](#) about this fic by [westywallowing on tumblr](#) or [twitter](#)!! thank you so much for taking your time to do this, i appreciate it so much <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

As expected, George is exhausted the next day, muscles sore and covered in bruises from last night’s skating session. Outside, it’s dark and dreary. Rain splatters onto the floor in tiny explosions and hits the window with tiny pitter patters. Water droplets slide down the length of the glass, dispersing when they hit the bottom edge.

George has never liked the rain much. It’s okay, he supposes — at the very most it’s an excuse to curl up in bed by his laptop or stay a tiny bit longer at the ice rink waiting for the weather to calm down.

But when he’s up at seven in the morning forcing himself to complete his biography analysis hours before it’s due, the dark and dreary weather *really* doesn’t help at all in waking him up.

George is at a coffee shop — he doesn’t even like coffee that much, to be honest — soaking wet from rain despite the little blue umbrella he left in the stand by the door. He feels drowsy while standing in line, blinking away the urge to sleep and running his hands through his hair.

He steps up to the cash register. Squints at the menu perched above the loudly whirring coffee bean grinder. Orders some whatever flavoured iced coffee with a blueberry-something muffin for breakfast. Pays with a fifty dollar bill — he’s still trying to break some of the bills he got from the currency exchange stand at the airport — and plops down in an armchair when he receives his order.

He sips at his straw with one hand while precariously balancing his laptop on his lap with the other. Quickly navigating through his various files, George opens his unfinished Microsoft Word

document. The corner of his screen, mockingly, reads *7:36 AM* — only about three hours left until he's got his first class of the day and won't be able to work on the analysis anymore.

George shifts in his seat and stifles a yawn. He sets his coffee down, the condensation from the cup still wet on his fingertips, and starts typing. The soft leather of the armchair is comforting enough to make him want to tuck his legs in and curl up into the chair.

He shakes away the urge and focuses back on the brightly lit screen. His head's swimming with exhaustion, but any second now the coffee will kick in and jolt him awake.

The sound of his keyboard clacking quickly fades into the hum and buzz of the coffee shop. The cash register dings, students chatter aimlessly, and the bell above the entrance chimes occasionally.

George doesn't look up from his computer until the bell rings again, tinkling and soft, and then there's a tall, dark shadow casting over George's face.

Clay clears his throat and says, "Hello." All polite and cordial with a pleasant smile on his face.

George rubs his eyes to clear the foggy haze he's seeing through. There's a halo of light surrounding Clay's form, backlit by the yellow-tinted lamp behind him. "Good morning," George manages to say. His voice is still croaky from sleep.

"You're here early," Clay points out. He takes a seat across from George and clasps his hands together over his knees.

"I'm trying to —" George starts, then sighs heavily. "You're going to be mad at me for this one."

Clay's face contorts from one of gentle smiles to one of concern and confusion. "For what?"

"I left my biography analysis until the last minute, and now it's due today and it's *still* not done," George says, all in one breath.

"The one I helped you with?"

George nods dumbly. Clay runs a hand through his sandy blond hair.

"Pass it here," says Clay, and he reaches over the coffee table for the laptop balanced atop George's lap.

George does indeed pass it over and takes a long, forceful sip from his coffee cup. It tastes bitter yet with hints of vanilla bean.

Skimming the document, Clay's fingers fly across the trackpad with grace. "Why did you wait until the last minute?"

"I don't know," whines George between swallows of coffee. "I just didn't wanna work on it."

"So you went to the hockey game last night instead?"

George raises an eyebrow. The only person that he spoke to about going to the game beforehand was Sapnap. Was it that obvious? That he'd prioritized fun over schoolwork?

He brings his cup down from his mouth. "What? How'd you know?"

Clay's eyes stop sweeping across the document and freeze in place. "I guessed," he answers, much too quickly before resuming his proofreading. "Sapnap being your roommate and all that."

George opts to take a bite of his muffin. “Did you go?”

“No,” says Clay, clipped and curt. And then, in a kinder tone: “I was working on a writing assignment.”

The muffin’s long gone after a few minutes of silence, and all that’s left is its wrapper. George gets up to throw it away. When he returns, Clay’s tilting the laptop towards him and pointing at the screen.

“It’s good,” he says earnestly, “but I made some edits in the third and fourth paragraphs to help with word choice and sentence flow. And I know you aren’t done with the conclusion yet, but make sure that you’re really finding that last sentence that wraps everything up, y’know? Like the ribbon on top of the present.”

It’s good advice. Clay knows that George isn’t the best writer, but he’s being patient and supportive nonetheless. George takes the laptop and skims through the document. It’s true — the words do flow better now, like a gentle stream of water.

George focuses hard on the screen. “Huh. You’re right.”

“Yeah? All the edits are okay?” asks Clay. He scratches the back of his neck.

“It’s weird,” says George with confusion. “Before the edits, I never would’ve thought to make any changes. But, like, after — it’s so obviously *better*. I don’t know why I didn’t think about it earlier.”

Clay clears his throat. “Yeah, well, English is hard, so...”

“It is,” George agrees easily, looking up from his laptop.

“My class doesn’t start for another few hours,” announces Clay. He shifts in his seat, jeans squeaking softly against worn leather. “So if you need any more help...”

“Mine neither.”

An hour and a whole coffee later, George steps out of the coffee shop and holds out a hand to check for rain. It’s calmed down now, but the air is still warm and heavy from moisture. Above, the sun peeks through thick clouds of white and grey.

“Thank you again,” he says when his sneakers hit the sidewalk.

“It’s really no problem,” insists Clay. “I like editing people’s work. It’s fun.”

The biography analysis is done and saved to George’s laptop, fittingly titled *Biography Analysis Final Final2 FINAL*. It’s all ready to print and submit to the Literary Nonfiction professor.

The pair walk down the street towards the heart of campus — George is going to the library to print and staple his assignment, and Clay is heading straight to class.

Clay points at George’s backpack. “Have you finished that book I recommended?”

George grimaces and shakes his head. “I haven’t, actually,” he confesses.

“Oh.” Clay picks at the hem of his jacket — it’s a lightweight aviator jacket lined with faux fur.

“I mean,” George adds quickly, “I *want* to. I’ve just been really busy with skating practice and assignments. You saw how I had to rush my work just now, right?”

“No, I get it,” says Clay. He faces George with a kindhearted smile. “Take your time. And don’t procrastinate your English assignments to the last second next time, yeah?”

George laughs. “No promises.”

After algebra, lunch with Sapnap, and a flurry of other classes, George is sitting in class alone and *bored out of his mind*. His computer programming professor’s droning on and on about the next unit in the class, using a metre stick to point at the projection of his computer screen.

And sure. As much as George likes computer programming — he loves it, really — he just can’t bring himself to pay attention. Maybe it’s his professor’s painfully monotone voice, or maybe it’s the distracting shuffle of his classmates’ notes. Whatever it is, his mind always manages to wander elsewhere.

Somehow, using the laptop he’s supposed to be taking notes with, he finds himself on the Northern University Lions’ webpage.

George clicks his way to the figure skating page. It’s mostly empty — it’s only the start of the school year, after all, and all the articles are about last year’s events. At the top of the page, he clicks *Roster*. Scrolls down, down, down, past his teammates’ beaming faces, until he reaches his own profile.

He’s smiling brightly at the camera wearing a sleek, green quarter zip sweater. The university lion mascot rests proudly atop his heart, a reminder of his dedication to his sport. A quick glance of George’s profile shows his full name, height, hometown, and even a short personal description. All this information about him is just *out there* on the internet, ready for anyone to read.

The students around him chuckle at a joke the professor makes, pulling George’s attention back towards the front of the class. He straightens his back and does his best to look like a good student while continuing his mindless internet browsing.

And then, out of sheer boredom, and perhaps a bit of curiosity, he’s on the ice hockey page and clicking on the team roster. He browses through names he vaguely remembers seeing on the backs of green jerseys during last night’s game.

Here’s the funny thing: right below Sapnap’s profile is Dream’s profile, all neat and organized with his player information. What differentiates the two, however, is that Dream’s profile doesn’t have a picture to go with it. Where there would be a photo of him is just a placeholder image of the Lions’ logo.

George clicks on Dream’s page and opens Sapnap’s in another tab. Sapnap’s page has all sorts of information — full name (Sapnap had graciously explained to George that Sapnap was a nickname after being called *Nicholas* by their algebra professor), hometown, major, participation in last year’s hockey games, and even his *favourite movie*. In his picture, he’s got his lips quirked up in a slight smirk and has the same quarter zip as George on. There’s even a banner on his page depicting Sapnap in the middle of a game, clad in his jersey and helmet.

George switches back to Dream’s tab. Compared to Sapnap’s, it’s practically empty. Eyes flitting across the screen, George skims over his profile.

Dream | 6'3" | 195 LBS.

2020-2021: Appointed team captain by coach and popular vote.

2019-2020: Dressed for all regular season and playoff games. Achieved 17 assists and 28 points in the regular season. Ranked first on the team in goals and points. Helped Northern University to second-place finish at Royal Cup Final.

George squints. *Is that it?* he thinks. He looks the page over to make sure there isn't some hidden page he's missed. Clicks around aimlessly for good measure.

No pictures, no major, no personal information whatsoever. Not even a *name*. All there is to Dream's profile is *hockey*.

In the browser search bar, George types *Dream hockey Northern University* and scrutinizes the results only to come up empty. There's nothing more than a few articles on the school website detailing last year's games, all of which only have pictures of Dream on the ice with his helmet on.

"Huh," sounds George, tilting his head.

And perhaps he's a *bit* too loud, because the professor goes quiet and makes eye contact with him.

"Anyway," says the professor, switching the projector off with a loud *click*. "Now, as I'm sure you already know, in four weeks time I expect all of you to hand in the unit assignment on the syllabus."

George hides his head in his arms and tries to muffle his groan.

In the evening, George sits cross-legged in his desk chair and looks down at his empty mug.

"Do I do it, Sapnap?"

Sapnap swallows a bite of his second meatball sandwich of the night; George has learnt over the past few weeks that hockey players need much more sustenance than expected to keep up with their active lifestyle. "Do what?"

"Get another coffee," says George, hesitant.

"Hell no. You'll be awake all night," Sapnap answers, waving his sandwich in the air for added emphasis.

George swings his legs down to hit the carpeted floor. "That's kind of the point."

"You're fucking ridiculous."

As Sapnap eats with one hand and scribbles equations into his notebook with the other, George sets down his mug with a sigh and stares at his calendar with frustration. His schedule's jam packed with classes and practice — he's barely got any time to himself this month.

"How about an energy drink? Those could work," George suggests desperately.

"You are *dehydrated*," says Sapnap, and he reaches under his desk. "Catch." He throws a bottle of water that goes soaring through the air.

George catches it, barely, and gladly unscrews the cap. "Thanks."

Sapnap mumbles back a "you're welcome" and flips through his notes.

“Movie night?” asks George, sounding hopeful. “Next time we’re both free, I mean.”

“Yeah, of course,” Sapnap answers. He turns to George with a genuine smile that’s quickly replaced with a teasing smirk. “I’m picking what we watch, though.”

“You picked last time!”

“Well, *technically* I picked a *TV show* last time, so —”

“Technically you’re a massive *dumbass*. ”

“Fuck you, George,” says Sapnap, doing his best to look wounded. “*Dumbass* .”

It’s nice and quiet when Dream arrives. The hum of the heater in the locker room, the light puffs of his exhale, the *clunk* of his hockey stick as it hits the floor. No one else is here, just like it should be.

He’s only forty-five minutes early to hockey practice, as always. No big deal.

That is, until he opens the doors to the ice rink. *Then* it becomes a big deal.

Because there’s someone already there — someone graceful, someone elegant, gliding and twirling across the ice rhythmically.

Dream scrambles to put his helmet on and double checks the clasp for good measure. When he walks in, the figure skater doesn’t notice him, too enthralled in his practice to notice him.

George is dressed in all black, from his gloves to his pants to his form-fitting t-shirt — a clear deviation from the regular clothes he wears during informal practices. Arms stretched out, he skates backwards into a step sequence: legs bent, then the left leg outstretched behind him, then swung back up to turn counter-clockwise on his right foot.

Dream figures that he should probably make George aware of his presence so they don’t get a repeat of the first time they met, but he can’t bring himself to interrupt whatever it is that George has going on.

George skates forward and into a spin. His right leg extended and parallel to the ice, his torso facing up towards the ceiling. He finishes the spin with a few more upright rotations and glides to a stop, posing at the end with his arms up.

The sound of blades against ice comes to a halt, plunging the stadium into silence. George groans loudly and digs his palms into his eyes.

“That was really good,” says Dream, sincere, stepping up to open the gate.

George turns at the sound of his voice and moves closer. “Hello. You think?”

“Of course,” Dream replies, and the gate opens with a loud *thunk*. “I’ve said it before! You’re talented.”

“I know I can do better, though.” George’s lips are pulled into a tight grimace, his forehead creased with worry.

“Well, there’s always room for improvement no matter what,” suggests Dream encouragingly, “but it doesn’t take away from your talent.”

George gives a little smile. “Thanks,” he says, quietly.

Dream frowns. “Is there something wrong?”

“No,” says George, lying through his teeth. And then, even more unconvincingly: “Everything is good. I’m good.” He flexes his gloved hands, clenching and unclenching them.

Dream stares at him through his visor. “Okay,” he goes, all slow and doubtful.

They stand there for a moment, silent — Dream takes the opportunity to scrutinize George, looking for a possible explanation for his strange mood. His heart drops to his stomach. George didn’t see him without his helmet on, did he?

George awkwardly turns his head to look behind him, avoiding eye contact.

“I’m gonna go over there,” announces George slowly, pointing a thumb back at the other side of the rink.

“Wait!” Dream grabs George’s skinny, pale arm. George looks at him quizzically, dark eyes filled with confusion. “Uh,” sounds Dream, “are you sure there’s nothing wrong?”

“It’s fine, it’s nothing important.” George waves a hand to emphasise his point, looking off to the side. He can’t lie to save his life.

Dream tilts his head. “Come on, you can tell me,” he presses. “I’ve been told that I’m a *very* good listener.”

George takes a deep breath, inhaling the cold air, and looks down at his skates. “Okay,” he says. “Let’s sit down. I’m tired.”

Dream skates back to the gate to sit in the stands, but George stays where he is and stares at him blankly. “C’mon.” Dream gestures for George to follow.

“Not in the chairs,” says George petulantly, “here. On the ice.”

“On the *ice* ?”

“Yeah,” George confirms, skating out to the centre circle of the rink. “Like when I was really young, I used to just sit on the ice when I got tired during my lessons.”

“Your coach let you do that?” Dream scoffs.

George plops down on the ground and stretches out his legs. “No,” he answers with a grin.

Rolling his eyes, Dream hesitantly takes a seat. The ice is uncomfortably hard and chilly underneath him. “I am literally going to freeze my ass off.”

“You’re so *dramatic* ,” says George, laughing light and clear out loud.

“Okay.” Dream shifts, getting himself comfortable as he can get. “What’s going on?”

George looks up at the ceiling, rests his hands between his legs. “This — this is —” He sighs. “I’ve just been really stressed lately, and it sucks because this is just the start of the semester and stuff hasn’t even started picking up yet.”

Dream breathes out in relief — he knows George is telling the truth, and it has nothing to do with

him, thankfully.

“Stressed about what?” asks Dream, once he’s taken the time to compose himself.

George bites at his lower lip. It’s swollen and red. “Well, for figure skating, I stayed late today after practice to work on my form for my layover camel spin. And it’s okay — I can *do* it, but it’s not as good as I’d like it to be.”

“I’m sure you can get it,” says Dream reassuringly. “You just need to keep working at it.”

“But that’s not really the *problem* ,” George groans. He runs a hand through his hair.

“The problem?”

“The problem is that stuff keeps piling up. I spend, like, all day in classes and all night here. When I stay late after practice, my assignments start piling up and I’m too tired to pay attention in class. When I spend more time working on classwork, my skating doesn’t improve.” George rests his chin in one hand and draws circles onto the ice with his other. “It’s impossible.”

Dream can understand. He’s felt it — the same stress that George is feeling — time and time again, except with hockey. Between his own studies, personal projects, and hockey, he’s not got much time left over.

“I get it.” Dream nudges George’s leg lightly, and George looks up at him through layers of dark lashes. “How are your grades and assignments?”

George purses his lips. “Good enough, I suppose. I procrastinated my English assignment until this morning though, and I had to wake up early to finish it in time. My friend Clay even had to help me edit it.”

Dream’s breath catches in his throat, and suddenly the air feels much colder than before. “Cool,” he squeaks out.

Things are very much not cool.

“Yeah,” says George, drawing more patterns into the ice.

Clearing his throat, Dream says, “Well, you’ve got people to help you out, right? Like tutors and coaches. And your friends can help with assignments too. I’m sure your coaches will understand if you’re busy with classes. Those do come first.” He fiddles with the strings on his hockey skates. “Don’t stress, George. I know that sounds dumb, but if anyone can pull it off, it’s you.”

George looks up at Dream. Tilts his head so far it’s nearly sideways. “Yeah,” he repeats, “you’re right.”

Dream stabilizes himself on the slippery ice and stands up. He offers a hand to George and helps pull him to his feet. George’s hand is practically frozen from touching the ice.

“Thank you, Dream,” says George, dusting himself off.

“No problem. Hopefully that made you feel a little better,” replies Dream sincerely.

“It did.” Then, George opens his mouth, closes it. Furrows his eyebrows. “By the way,” he starts, “I was meaning to ask you about your —”

And before he can finish: “Dream!”

It's the hockey coach — practice is starting soon, and he's already here getting ready for the rest of the team to arrive.

"Nevermind, that's my cue to leave," announces George, already making his way to the gate. "I stayed way too late today."

"Bye," Dream calls out. "I'll see you later."

The gate swings open. George pivots to face Dream and smiles.

"Bye," he says, "thank you."

Chapter End Notes

if you didn't see at the start of the chapter, shoutout to amazing artist [westywallowing on tumblr](#) or [on twitter](#) who [drew figure skater george](#) SPECIFICALLY FOR THIS FIC!! i was so happy when i saw it, it made me feel so special and glad that you guys like this fic so much :')

dream and george don't like coffee but i imagine that doing school all day and skating all night is exhausting so they just need it sometimes to function

speaking of coffee i stayed up late to finish this so i will need some tomorrow.

thank u for reading !! comments + kudos are greatly appreciated :] i read and reply to every single comment!!

lastly: stream roadtrip by dream ft. pmbata

goodnight im going to bed

tutoring and hockey sticks

Chapter Summary

“You’re holding it like a golf club,” Dream points out when George tries holding the new hockey stick. “Try putting your left hand further down.”

“Like this?” George asks.

“Uh, no,” says Dream. He hesitates, then takes his gloves off and tucks them under his arm. “Here.”

Dream reaches out and takes George’s hand.

Chapter Notes

i am kinda surprised this fic is getting so much attention hehe!!
thankyouthankyouthankyou for 8000 hits and 700 kudos :]

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

October comes and goes quickly, and before George knows it the calendar is on the cusp of flipping to November. He spends most of his days working on assignments, sleeping whenever possible, and going to practice.

The weather’s getting chillier now — it’s comfortingly warm in the daytime under the burning sun, yet brisk and cool in the dark of night when most students in Amana Hall are long asleep. George learned that the hard way when he spent much too long at the ice rink after practice and nearly caught a cold while walking back to his dorm in nothing but a hoodie and light pants.

Sapnap had warned him prior, of course, citing something about never underestimating the fluidity of Canadian weather, but George had foolishly shrugged him off. Despite the windchill, George grit his teeth and toughed it out on the walk back in an attempt to save his pride.

Saturday’s weather is, thankfully, slightly warmer. On the running track by the university’s athletic centre, two figures jog at a steady pace following bright white lines dividing the track into lanes. In the centre of the track lies previously deep green grass, now tinged a dull yellow-grey from the cold weather.

George huffs out little puffs of warm air with each step. His running shoes hit the rubber ground underneath him in a pattern of *left, right, left, right, left, right*, a pitter-patter in tune with his thumping heart.

“Holy shit,” Sapnap heaves in gasping breaths, slowing his jog. “Stop.”

George eases his pace to a halt and turns back to look at Sapnap. “You okay?”

Sapnap bends himself over, legs slightly bent and hands on his knees. “What does it look like?” he

asks between laboured pants.

Once he's caught his breath, George beckons for him to walk the rest of their lap. George doesn't blame him for the sudden halt — the soles of his feet ache, and he'd be lying if he didn't say his lungs were starting to tire as well. He's been neglecting his off-ice practice recently, and it shows.

Apparently, Sapnap has been doing the same.

"My stamina's all fucked up," Sapnap says between gasps for air.

"When's the last time you went on a run?" George croaks. He winces at the sound and takes a swig of water to clear his throat.

Sapnap pulls his bandana off. It flutters in the wind like a flag before he stuffs it deep inside the pocket of his gym shorts. "Too long."

They arrive at the end of the track, marked by a horizontal line painted thick on the ground. George stretches out his body, bending down to grab at his ankles now that his legs are all warmed up. The exercise has made him barely feel the cold from the slight breeze in the air.

"What's the time?" George asks from the floor.

"Four minutes twelve seconds." Sapnap presses on the timer on his phone. "This one doesn't count, though. I slowed it down."

"Alright," George gets back up and rolls his shoulders back. "Let's go again."

"Again ?" Sapnap scoffs. "We're skaters, not runners, George."

"I can do better!" George insists, arms tangled in a bicep stretch. "Time me."

"No."

"Time me, Sapnap!"

"No!"

"One more," George begs. He holds up a finger to emphasize his point and waggles it in front of his face, eyebrows slanted up to plead. "This is the last one, I promise."

Sapnap shakes his head, and George seizes the opportunity to snatch his phone from out of his hands. His fingers close around the device, but before he can get away with it, the phone's stolen back from him again.

"We are going to *eat*." Sapnap shoves his phone in his pocket away from George's hands, now reaching towards Sapnap with grabby motions. "That was our *sixth lap*. It's lunchtime. I am going to go get *food*."

"I'm not hungry," George lies. The truth is that his stomach's been grumbling since lap number three.

"I have a team meeting after lunch!" Sapnap exclaims, a little impatiently. "I'm going to leave with or without you, George."

George rolls his eyes. "Fuck you, Sapnap," he gripes.

Sapnap turns and walks off the track back towards the heart of campus. George, begrudgingly, follows him anyways.

Afternoon sunlight streams through the big, arching windows at Willis Library and illuminates worn, browned book pages slotted between slender fingers. George sets the book down harshly, glancing around the library. There's a librarian poring over a historical drama novel, a short-haired girl typing furiously into her laptop, a scrawny boy taking notes from his biology textbook. And then, a tall, blond guy making his way across the room.

Clay walks towards him with his backpack and phone in hand. "Hello," he says, and takes a seat across from George at the desk. He takes care not to scratch the chair against the floor, lifting it rather than pushing it out. The floor creaks lowly when he sits, a telltale sign of the library's old age.

"Hello, Clay," George replies. "You're late." He means it to come off as teasing, but it sounds more snide than intended.

"Sorry," Clay says, placing his backpack on the wooden chair next to him. "I got held up with something." He shifts in his seat and turns to face George with a grin. "You finished the book?"

"I did," confirms George. He holds up his copy of *The Sand Castle* and then pushes it across the desk.

"And?" Clay presses excitedly. "What did you think about it?"

"It was good. I liked it."

Clay cranes his neck forward. "You *liked* it?"

"Yes?" says George, confused. He's feeling strangely attacked.

"Okay, what specifically did you like about it?" Clay asks slowly. George thinks he sounds vaguely like his old English teacher, poking and prodding at his unfortunately very vague understanding of the text.

He racks through his brain for an answer and chews at the inside of his cheek in thought. "I liked... the whole life story, I guess."

"You *guess*?" Clay echoes incredulously, face knitted into something of disbelief.

George puts his head in his hands. "I'm not good at English," he groans. "I told you."

It's quite ironic, George thinks, that the one person out of the two who's actually English is utterly terrible at the subject. That's not to say he isn't smart, because George knows he is — you don't get into computer science without a brain — but his mind works differently than Clay's, processes words on paper *systematically* rather than *creatively*.

"You're not *that* bad at English," Clay reassures, thumbing at the corners of the book pages.

George lets his arms hit the mahogany desk with a *thud*. "Thanks."

"Your biography analysis was really good." Clay pushes the worn biography back across the desk towards George. "I liked it."

"Thanks to you," George says pitifully, flipping the book around so he can glance over the cover.

He pulls at the chain on the table lamp next to him, casting a warm glow over the book and Clay's face.

"Me?"

"Your notes," George continues, "and your editing."

Clay pulls down the sleeves of his hoodie from where they were bunched up at his elbows. "I can always help you more, if you'd like," he offers.

George looks up. Meets Clay's eyes. Lifts up an eyebrow, and asks, "Yeah?"

"Of course," Clay says, like it's the most obvious thing in the world. "Whenever I have time. I can help you with coding stuff, too, if you need it."

George knows that life is unfair — some people are just born with natural talent and skill. This simply confirms it.

"How are you so *good at everything*," he whines a little too loudly. The librarian shoots him a dirty look, and George gives an apologetic smile.

Clay chuckles, as if amused at George's apparent misfortune. The lamp's light casts shadows against his sharp nose. "I study a lot."

"I can tell," quips George. He rests his chin in his left palm.

"You have to help me out with something, though," Clay announces. The library's surrounding guests whip their heads around to glare at the two — Clay offers an awkward wave and whispers a hushed "sorry".

"I'm listening," George half-whispers, half-yells. "Go on."

Clay leans slightly over the desk so he can hear better and hisses, "I tutor you in Literary Nonfiction. You read more books."

George visibly recoils and slinks back into his seat. "What is with you and your obsession with books?"

"I'm an English major," Clay deadpans. "That's my thing."

George takes the time to consider his offer. Narrows his eyes. Weighs the pros and the cons in his head. Scrutinizes Clay's face for any hint of malice; there's none.

"Okay," he says slowly, "Fine." Because as much as he hates English, George isn't an idiot. He's not about to refuse an offer for help that he desperately needs.

To that, all Clay has to say is "Awesome." He pulls out a small journal from his backpack and props it up in the gap between his stomach and the desk. "When can you meet up next?"

George checks his calendar on his phone — it's jam packed with classes and practice, but he can make a little bit of time. "Tomorrow? 3 PM?"

"Works for me." Clay produces a pen from his bag and jots something down, staring intently at his schedule. "Can we, uh, meet here?"

"Sure," says George. He quickly types the event into his phone, mimicking Clay's organizational

skills.

Clay shuts the journal tightly and drops it back inside his bag. “I’ll see you later, then?”

George blinks. “That’s it?”

“What?”

“You aren’t going to ask me to give a book report on the biography or something?” George asks, tracing the creases on the paperback book cover. He’s only half-joking, toeing the line between genuine surprise and teasing.

“Well, I mean —” Clay starts, and then, quieter: “I thought you hated English.”

“I mean, a little bit,” George replies thoughtfully. “I just haven’t fulfilled *my end* of the bargain yet, you know. But if you don’t want me to...”

“No, no —” Clay breaks into a broad grin. “I wanna hear your thoughts.”

George smiles, small and sweet. “Okay.” He flips the biography open to the first page.

Suddenly, Clay reaches out and lightly taps at the book. “Uh, sorry,” he says, pulling his arm back, “but maybe we should do this, like, somewhere else.”

Clay widens his eyes subtly and turns his head to gesture around the grand library — there’s a nearby girl stuffing earbuds into her ears, switching seats to somewhere quieter, and an older professor glaring at them from over the screen of his rickety laptop.

George grimaces. “Yeah.” He slips his bag on and gets up, gently pushing his chair back in. “Let’s go.”

“And remember, the fall invitational is coming up soon, so keep practicing your routines and I’ll see you all on Monday.”

George nods and watches as his coaches and teammates slowly file off of the ice one by one. He, however, stays where he is and kicks at the little piles of shaved ice by his feet.

“Staying back again, George?” his coach calls out, one skate on the ice and the other halfway through the gate.

It’s just the two of them left behind. The last skater lets the door leading from the rink to the hallway slam shut loudly, and the sound reverberates off of the cloudy plexiglass.

“Uh, yeah,” George replies.

His coach makes a sound of disapproval and shakes her head. “Don’t overwork yourself, okay? Take a break if you need it.”

George gives a comforting smile. “Don’t worry, I will,” he says, waving goodbye as the coach steps out and shuts the gate behind her.

The stadium is dead quiet, save for the hum of the ventilation system and scraping noises of blades against ice. Bored, George skates around aimlessly, swinging his arms around and letting the chilled air whiz past him.

He looks behind him, arms outstretched, and does two backward crossovers, reaching out with his inside leg and cutting through with his outside leg. Then, he pushes into a lazy version of a scratch spin. After a few rotations, George crosses his feet and tucks his arms in close to his chest, then exits the spin gliding on one foot.

When he slowly comes to a stop, he spots Dream coming into the stadium from across the rink.

“Dream,” George says in a sing-song voice. He skates closer and lets his arms hang low by his side. “Hello. Fancy seeing you here.”

The hockey player unlocks the gate and steps onto the ice. The blade of his stick and the sharpness of his skates *clack* against the ice loudly.

“Hi,” he says, sounding enthusiastic. “Fancy seeing you here too.”

There’s an air of awkwardness surrounding them, stuffy despite the noticeable chill. George hadn’t meant to bombard Dream with all his stresses — he would’ve been perfectly happy to keep them to himself — but Dream had insisted that he open up.

He swallows. “Splitting the rink again?” George asks. He starts to skate backwards towards the left side of the stadium.

Dream holds out a hand and signals for George to stop. “No, no, wait,” he stammers. “Stay here.”

“Here?” echoes George, pointing downwards.

“Hold this.” Dream shoves his hockey stick into George’s hands and dashes back towards the gate.

George is left standing in the centre of the rink, utterly confused. He looks down at his hands, loosely gripped around the wooden handle of the stick. The paint on the end of the stick is all scratched up and dented from use. He rests the tip of the blade on the floor and swings it back and forth, listening to the quiet sounds of it scraping against the ice.

There’s a loud *bang* on the other side of the door outside the stadium. George watches as it slowly creaks open, then quickly swings shut — until the door’s blocked by something in its way.

“What the —” George starts, but the words die on his tongue as he realizes what’s going on.

A tall hockey net is forcibly shoved through the doorway, and from behind it emerges Dream. He pushes the net forward across the rubber flooring and then shuffles in behind it.

“Help me open the gate,” he calls out, hoisting up the hockey net with one arm.

George skates over and does as he’s told, holding the gate open and standing to the side. Dream sets the net down first, letting it slide across the ice, and then steps in after it.

“Usually I would get it through the Zamboni entrance, but my coach isn’t here and I don’t have the key to the door,” Dream rants. The unprompted explanation spills out of him like gushing water.

George shuts the gate and turns to stare at the hockey player with a bewildered look. “A hockey net?”

“Yeah,” answers Dream. He pushes the net over to one side of the rink.

“For what?” George asks, amused. He moves to get a closer look and watches as Dream kneels on the ice to fasten the net in place, just behind a thin line and a bright blue semicircle.

Dream stands once he's done and picks up a black hockey puck from where it was resting on top of the net. He tosses it up, then catches it in his hands. "You said a few weeks ago that you could score the same goal as me, but there weren't any nets."

"I did," says George slowly.

Dream opens his palm and lets the puck fall to the ground. It clatters and slides across the ice, landing right at George's feet.

And although George can't see Dream's face, he can hear the grin in his voice when Dream says: "Here's a net. Prove it."

George scrunches up his nose and shakes his head. "Uh," he hesitates, "no thanks."

"You said you would!" exclaims Dream despairingly.

"Well, I actually said *maybe*," George says. He nudges the puck back towards Dream with the hockey stick.

"Why are you backing out?" Dream asks, rambunctious. His head tilts up slightly as he talks, and just beneath his face shield George can see a tiny sliver of his chin before it's covered by the tinted plastic again.

"I'm not backing out," retorts George, but it falls on deaf ears.

"You're just... too scared."

Perhaps George shouldn't have been so full of talk, but his pride is too big to surrender now and admit defeat. He shakes his head.

"I'm not scared," he insists, and bangs the blade of the hockey stick against the ground like he's stomping his foot.

"Then why won't you just *try*," Dream complains.

"No," says George, petulant.

"Come on," the hockey player groans. "You can just do it from here. No goalie." Dream skates a little ways away and points to the ice with a gloved hand.

It's a spot directly in front of the net, just a few metres away from the goal line. From here, it's a clear and easy shot to get the puck into the net. Just a flick of the wrist and a strong swing, right?

George sighs in exasperation. Rolls his eyes. Takes a deep breath, and says, "Okay, I'll do it."

Dream laughs beneath his helmet, celebratory and light. "Yay," he replies, and gently kicks the puck.

It lands at George's feet yet again and hits against his skate, dusty black clashing with creamy white. Dream skates to the side of the net, giving George his position. George pushes the puck to his side and positions it in front of the blade of the hockey stick.

He can feel Dream's judging eyes boring into him. George takes a deep breath. Bends his knees slightly. Focuses on the centre of the net, and, with all the force he can muster, swings his arms and takes the shot.

Turns out that it's really not just a flick of the wrist or a strong swing at all. The puck launches through the air, thankfully, so fast that George can barely see the blur of movement —

And hits Dream square in the chest.

“Ow,” he says plainly.

George grimaces. “Are you okay?” He skates towards him, eyebrows raised in concern.

Dream bends down slightly and rubs at the spot where the puck hit him. George desperately hopes that he hasn't hurt the star hockey player, placing a shaky hand on his shoulder. Dream remains silent and takes a deep breath.

And then, loudly, he shouts, “I told you!”

“Are you *kidding* me?” George shrills. He snatches his arm back. “What is wrong with you?”

“I knew it,” Dream announces proudly. “I knew it! You can't play hockey.”

“What is the matter with you?” George groans. Despite the words, there's a bright smile on his face.

Dream cracks up again, muffled by his helmet. “Listen, listen,” he starts. His voice is croaky from laughter, and he takes a moment to compose himself. “I will help you,” he announces, slightly out of breath.

“Help me with *what*?” George scoffs sharply. “Hockey?”

“It'll be fun,” Dream pleads.

George takes a moment to contemplate. He's supposed to be practicing right now on his side of the rink while Dream does his own drills on the other side, like always.

But perhaps he'll take a break for tonight.

“Okay,” George says. “I suppose.”

Dream rubs his hands together. “Okay, hold the hockey stick?”

George brings the blade of the stick down to the ground. He clasps both his hands tightly around the wooden shaft of the stick, his left hand just below his right. Dream tilts his head, observing his form.

“You're left handed,” Dream says. “My stick is right handed.”

Frankly, George didn't even know it mattered. He blinks, then juts out his bottom lip in thought. “Oh. So now what?”

“I'll get you another one,” Dream calls out, turning back towards the gate. He steps out and then through the door, leaving George standing on the ice alone yet again.

It's suffocatingly silent without Dream here. The cold air envelops George all over. He fidgets with the hem on his gloves and smooths out the wrinkles on his figure skating shirt.

When Dream returns, the two exchange hockey sticks. While the right handed stick curves left, George notices that the left handed one curves right.

“You’re holding it like a golf club,” Dream points out when George tries holding the new stick.
“Try putting your left hand further down.”

“Like this?” George asks.

“Uh, no,” says Dream. He hesitates, then takes his gloves off and tucks them under his arm.
“Here.”

Dream reaches out and takes George’s hand. He slides George’s left hand halfway down the hockey stick and then grasps both of his hands to change their angle, lifting the blade of the stick off the ground.

Despite the temperature, Dream’s hands are comfortingly warm — so much so that George can feel the heat burning through his own gloves, hot enough to evaporate ice. When Dream retracts, the warmth remains, like a crackling fire before it slowly fades away. George takes a deep breath, not used to such contact.

A clear of the throat. “There,” Dream affirms. “Like that.”

It’s strange, really. George has never seen Dream so quiet, but he shakes away the thoughts, shutting his eyes and willing them to go away.

“Okay,” says George. He looks down at his hands, firmly gripping the wooden handle of the hockey stick. “Now what?”

“Uh, try taking a shot,” Dream suggests. His voice is encouraging, yet with a tinge of something unrecognizable.

George lines up in front of the net again and places the puck down in front of him. His stick taps against the ice, then the edge of the puck. He bites his lip and furrows his eyebrows in concentration. Then, with a deep breath, he brings the hockey stick up and quickly back down to take his shot.

The puck cuts across the air faster, stronger, in the right direction this time. George watches as it flies through its trajectory, waiting for it to hit against the back of the net —

Until it ricochets off of the scratched ice rink boards just a few metres away from the goal. It lands on the ice and slides backwards as pathetically slow as it can until coming to a stop.

“Dream,” George groans despairingly, “*help me* .”

“That was better than last time!”

George ticks up an eyebrow. Ticks down his hockey stick. “What, because I didn’t hit you this time?”

Dream chuckles. “Yes, because you didn’t hit me this time.”

In Willis Library the next day, George covers his mouth to stifle his yawn. He’s sitting in a quiet corner, hidden behind layers of towering bookshelves. When he inhales, he smells old paper; when he exhales, little particles of dust dance in front of his face.

He struggles to keep his eyelids open, the letters on the book in front of him dancing and swaying in his wavering vision. It’s surprising, really, that he’s managed to stay awake for all his classes

today.

But now, here, stretching out his joints in his chair like a sleepy cat, George has to fight the urge to go back to his dorm and *nap*. Lazily, he checks his phone — there's a text from Clay.

Clay: Hey I'm on my way

Sent 2 minutes ago

George puts his phone back down, slows his breathing, rests his head in his palm. Clay is still a few minutes away from Willis Library — it's perfectly plausible for him to get a couple minutes of sleep in and wake up refreshed, ready to learn.

He slumps his head down onto the desk and tucks his arms underneath. The beginnings of another yawn tug at his lips, and he nestles his face deeper into the crook of his arm, shifts his feet to a more comfortable position, lets his heavy eyelids flutter shut —

And before he knows it, he's asleep.

Chapter End Notes

so glad to get back to this fic :D struggled with writer's block for a week and procrastinated by writing other fics but yesterday i sat down and banged out like 2000 words out of 4046

please please comment down below because i love to see your reactions, especially for this chapter bc some BIG stuff happened

i appreciate the support more than u know :] shoutout to all my regular commenters and readers -- u guys are the real MVPs and motivate me to keep writing

follow me on my newly created [twitter](#) where i will be talking to u guys and, starting with the next chapter, will be posting a few sneak peeks :DD

wins and losses

Chapter Summary

George laughs and looks down to fiddle with the hem of his gloves. “My performance... could’ve been better. I mean, some of the other skaters there were really good. They were flawless, basically.”

“What, and you aren’t?”

George snorts. “Shut up.”

Chapter Notes

THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU FOR 15K+ HITS AND 1K+ KUDOS!!
MWAH MWAH MWAH

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The first thing George notices when he begins to stir is that his face is uncomfortably pressed onto the desk.

He squeezes his eyes shut. Tucks his nose a little deeper into the soft fabric of his sweater. Sighs contentedly and stops shifting around —

Until he can hear the sound of someone else’s breaths coming from next to him, low and gentle.

George’s eyes fly open — there’s still the remnants of sleep coating his eyelashes, but this is *far* more important — and, slowly, he lifts his head and peers over his arm.

Next to him, Clay is slumped onto the library desk, head resting on his forearm like a makeshift pillow. He’s got one arm slightly outstretched and loosely gripping a black ink pen. His eyes are fluttered shut, his mouth ever so slightly parted.

From here, George can see the straight slope of Clay’s nose. The loose strand of hair in his face that ruffles slightly when he exhales. The dusting of freckles that cover his cheeks. And, as George’s gaze fixates on the long blond eyelashes that frame Clay’s eyes —

His eyes open. The pen mockingly clatters to the desk.

Clay doesn’t move and neither does George, not daring to break eye contact. The two are frozen in time, flushed cheeks obscured by green and blue hoodie sleeves, heads stuck to rickety wooden library desks. Clay’s eyes are wide, his pupils blown, and George has the good sense to pull away first.

“Sorry,” says George, prying his face off of his textbook and averting his gaze. “I fell asleep.”

Clay’s voice is still groggy and laced with exhaustion when he stretches and replies, “It’s okay. I

did too.”

“Ugh,” George sounds. The bright white of his phone screen makes him squint his eyes. “I slept for half an hour.”

“I feel like I only got to sleep for half a *minute*,” Clay groans, digging the heels of his palms into his eyes.

George ticks up an eyebrow. “What, did you stay up late last night?”

Clay clears his throat and picks the pen back up, twirling it in his fingers. “I did,” he croaks. “Did you?”

“I guess so,” George says, thoughtful. He runs a hand up his face. “I was — I stayed late at the ice rink last night.”

“Yeah?” Clay stifles a yawn, screwing up his face.

George brings his hand to his mouth to do the same. “I’ve got the fall invitational coming up,” he continues after a moment, “and I was doing... stuff.” Strangely, he doesn’t mention Dream, doesn’t want Clay to know about his less than productive activities.

“Stuff?” Clay echoes.

“Yes, *stuff*.” George flips through his Literary Nonfiction textbook. He squeezes his eyes shut, blinking away the sleep, and sighs. “Okay, tutoring.”

“Tutoring,” repeats Clay slowly, like his mind is still racing to catch up with the conversation. Then: “What’s the fall invitational?”

George bites the inside of his cheek. “Well, it’s like this figure skating event for all the university figure skating clubs in the area,” he explains. “There’s the fall one in November, and the winter one in January. And in February, we’re doing the championships.”

“Sounds like fun,” Clay says. “When is it?”

“In two weeks,” replies George, “just after midterms.”

Clay frowns. “That’s soon.”

“Yeah, it is,” George agrees. He takes a deep breath, and then swerves away from the topic. “Okay Clay, what’ve you got for me to learn?” He slips his worn down pencil out from his backpack and hovers it over his notebook, waiting for Clay to do the same.

But instead of pulling out his notes, Clay says, “You should go home.”

George lowers his hand to the desk. Snaps his head to meet Clay’s gaze. “Home?” he asks. “But we haven’t started yet.”

“You’re tired,” says Clay, pulling down his sleeves. “And you have the fall invitational coming up. You should get some rest.”

“You’re tired too,” George points out, poking Clay’s arm with his pencil. “Are you going home?”

Clay doesn’t flinch when the eraser end of the pencil jabs him. “No, I have to study for midterms.”

“So do I,” says George, gently poking him one last time. “C’mon, one hour of tutoring. I’m not *that* tired.”

“You fell asleep before I got here,” Clay protests.

“You fell asleep as soon as you arrived!” George retorts.

Clay sighs. Rolls his eyes. Gives a half-amused scoff and a smile. “Okay, one hour.”

When Clay turns to pull his notes out of his bag, George sits up in his chair with a self-satisfied grin — but the swirl of nervousness inside him, about the invitational, about his midterms, about tutoring, sits heavy in his mind as Clay drones on about the differences between each genre of nonfiction.

Midterms come and go in a flurry of exams and assignments. George scores well on his Literary Nonfiction midterm (“*Eighty-two*, Clay!” He had beamed. “That’s the best mark I’ve gotten in that class ever!”) and soon enough, the fall invitational glides around the corner.

“I shouldn’t be this nervous,” George says. “I shouldn’t be this nervous!”

The guy who’s washing his hands beside him gives him a weird glance through the washroom mirror.

George closes his eyes and takes a deep breath. He looks up into the mirror — he’s wearing a collared green button-up shirt and a pair of black pants to match the school’s colours — and stares himself right in the eye, trying not to grimace too much when he notices the beginnings of purply-brown dark circles.

Hiding out in the washroom before his first performance in Canada is a bit of a weak move, but it brings a sense of comfort that George desperately craves.

He just needs to pretend that he doesn’t hear the sounds of a flushing toilet.

“I’m fine,” George reassures himself, “I’m *fine*.”

And it’s true — he really is. He’s practiced for hours upon hours, weeks upon weeks just for the invitational. George knows it’s perfectly normal to be a little bit anxious before a big performance, but that doesn’t stop the tightening in his chest when he thinks of going up in front of all the judges.

In his head, he runs through his routine — pivot, step, toe loop jump, backward crossover, sit spin, forward stroke, Lutz — and visualizes each move. The details are fuzzy with anxiety, but George knows that as soon as he gets onto the ice and the music begins, all the moves will come rushing back.

For the fall invitational, George has been asked to represent Northern University for the Men’s Freeskate discipline. He’ll be performing carefully practiced figure skating in front of a panel of judges, competing against over a dozen other skaters looking to bring home a gold medal for their schools.

The thought is enough to make him shiver involuntarily.

Staring in the mirror, tucking a loose strand of hair into place, George feels the fists of worry freezing over every cell of his body. Deep inhales of air fill his lungs as he tries to calm his heart,

thumping to the beat of the music he can hear leaking in from the ice rink.

George pulls his phone out of the front pocket of his bag, and the clock reads only ten minutes until he's due to show up with the rest of his team. He gives himself one last glance over in the mirror. Smooths out the wrinkles on his shirt. Slings his duffle bag over his shoulder —

And walks out of the bathroom and into the stadium.

Simultaneously, at a game two hours away, Dream walks out of the locker room to the sight of Sapnap chugging an energy drink.

“What is that,” Dream deadpans.

“It’s supposed to get me hyped up, Dream,” Sapnap says, and he reaches up to knock a fist twice on the side of Dream’s helmet. “You should try it sometime.”

“Lemme see,” Dream says. He makes grabby-hands towards the bottle, and Sapnap passes it over.

Sapnap gestures at the door to the locker room. “Is everyone dressed yet?”

Dream squints at the label and shoves it back into Sapnap’s hands with a grimace. “Your drink is disgusting — that *cannot* be good for you,” Dream says, barreling past Sapnap’s amused scoff. “Everyone’s dressed, though. We’re just waiting for Coach to give us the go-ahead.”

There’s a lull in the conversation as the vents in the hallway rattle with excitement. Dream can feel the energy coursing through the cracks in the doorframe, out of the locker room and into the air. It’s all heavy music, rowdy voices, and wooden hockey sticks clacking on the hard rubber floor. He rests the tip of his own stick on the floor and twirls at it absentmindedly.

“What are you thinking about?” Sapnap interrupts.

Dream knows that he asks purely out of genuine concern, because Sapnap is somehow able to sense Dream’s nervousness without even seeing his face. It’s commendable, truly, while also painfully expected. The heart on Dream’s sleeve is always visible — even when it’s covered by the cotton fabric of his hockey jersey.

So Dream laughs it off. “Nothing, I promise. Just pre-game jitters, I guess.”

Sapnap nods slowly. “Alright. I’ll see you on the ice, man,” he tells him, clapping Dream on the back. Sapnap ducks back inside of the locker room, no doubt to swap out his bottle for his mouthguard.

The door swings shut. Dream tries to balance his stick against the walls of the hallway, leaning it against thickly painted brick — but it proves useless when the stick inevitably tilts over. He darts a hand out and catches it just before it clatters to the ground.

Sighing, Dream thumps his head against the wall. He looks down at his hands. Hidden under his gloves are calloused fingertips and nails bitten short. Beneath his heavy skates are tensed-up feet. And concealed by the dark visor of his helmet, the skin under his eyes is greyed-out and sunken.

Despite it all, his palms buzz, itching to get onto the ice.

Coach swings by soon after to remind the team of their planned strategy. They’re unfortunately playing against the Langham Warriors again — this time at Langham University, located a few

hours northeast of Northern University's campus. The building is unfamiliar and dizzying.

Filing out of the locker room, the Lions walk down the hall to the stadium, as raucous as ever. Sapnap playfully shoves Bad to the side; Bad retorts with a "Hey!" back. The air seems to crackle with bursts of energy with each witty remark and word of encouragement from each player. Watching from behind, Dream grins.

In the stadium, the stands are half-filled with cheering parents and family members. The Warriors are already darting around the rink, the blades of their skates clashing against thick ice. A few of them slow to watch as the Lions arrive. Dream can already hear Tommy's pointed jeers through the clouded plexiglass.

One by one, the Lions slip through the gate. Dream steps out last and follows as his teammates skate around the edges of the rink. Before he can move, however:

"Dream!"

He whips around. Tommy's standing there with a massive grin plastered on his face. The plastic of his half-visor is slightly fogged up, and his hair is tangled and messy underneath.

Dream sighs. Tightens his grip on his stick. "What do you want, Tommy?"

Tommy scoffs. He stammers a little, until he adds: "I just wanted to wish you good luck before the game, Big D."

Dream winces. "You really need to stop calling me that."

Another pair of skates comes to a skidding stop in front of him, and suddenly Tubbo is next to Tommy. His jersey is wrinkled, but his hockey stick looks freshly taped.

"Dream!" Tubbo greets. He pivots to face Tommy. "Did you wish him good luck yet?"

Tommy beams. "I did." And then, boisterously: "Because he's going to need it!"

"Yeah, he's going to need it!" Tubbo agrees. He reaches up for a high-five, and Dream watches as their two gloved hands smack together triumphantly.

Dream points his hockey stick forward. "I don't need anything," he says, confident. "If anything, it's the other way around."

"Yeah, but you haven't seen what we have *planned* yet, Dream. We're sneaky," Tommy insists.

Under his helmet, Dream laughs. "Don't forget you *lost* last time. You guys talk big game, but never live up to it."

"Oh, but last time doesn't mean anything," Tubbo dismisses with the shake of a head. "You'll see."

Tommy nods, and there's a look on his face that screams *I know something you don't*. "You'll see."

The two of them skate off, leaving Dream perplexed and standing alone by the gate. Around him, quick-footed hockey players cast gusts of chilly air as they whiz past. Dream hesitates for a moment — stopping to think, *what the hell was that* — until he shakes his head and dispels the thoughts away. He doesn't need to stress himself out before the game.

A whistle sounds out through the stadium, and Dream skates up to his position at the face-off dot.

Glances over to Bad on his right and Skeppy on his left. Bites at his bottom lip as he focuses on the start of the game.

Across from him, Techno's eyes are steely and determined as the stadium quiets. There's no friendly handshake this time, no smart remark — instead, Techno gives a curt nod. It's unsettling.

"Dream," he says.

"Techno."

The referee holds the puck high above the middle of the rink, and Dream stands with his legs apart. He bends his knees and angles his hockey stick parallel to Techno's, ready to swoop in and pass the puck to Bad.

Holding his breath, Dream watches as the puck clatters to the slippery ice. There's a scuffle, at first; it slips back and forth across the centre line, clattering against their hockey sticks, until Dream manages to knock it out of place and to the right.

Bad catches the pass just before Tommy can intercept, and he barrels down the rink to get to the Warrior's goal — until Tommy blocks his path, and he's forced to pass it back to Dream.

The puck goes flying across painted lines and smooth ice, but misses Dream's expectant hockey stick. Tubbo darts forward to catch it, and before Dream knows it, Tubbo has already shot the puck across the rink again.

At the very edge of the Warriors' blue line, Techno gains possession of the puck and turns to skate away with it. He drives it through the neutral zone and into the Lions'. With the flick of a wrist, he shoots it forward and to the right. The puck bounces lightly off of the scratched up wall. Before it can slide to a stop, Ponk and Sam dash to send it back the other way — but Tommy reaches it before them and swerves the puck behind the goal.

Sam splits off and tries to trap him behind, both defensemen blocking both sides of the goal off. Dream feels a small swell of pride — his team's about to steal the puck back — until he sees that somehow, miraculously, Tommy squeezes past Ponk and passes the puck to Techno in between his legs.

Techno positions the puck on his stick. For a brief moment, there's an opening between him and the goal.

He shoots.

The puck barely misses. It ricochets off of the metal of the goal post, landing a few feet away from the net. Dream pumps his legs faster, the blades of his skates leaving deep cuts in the ice, but watches in dismay as Tubbo swoops in and captures it.

There's no time to react. At the left side of the goal, Tubbo promptly curves the puck past Callahan's kneepads and into the bottom left corner of the net.

Horns blare mockingly throughout the stadium. Tubbo has scored in just the first few minutes of the game. The Warriors go wild with loud hollers and cheers, circling together and patting each other on the back. When they break apart and return to their positions, Tommy shoots Dream a smug look before skating back towards the centre of the rink.

The stadium quiets once again as Dream takes position at the face-off dot. *Only one to nothing*, he reassures himself. *We'll bring it back. We always do.*

Until the Warriors score again. And again. And by halfway through the second period, the Warriors are 3-0 against the Lions. Dream feels a little dizzy when he's reminded of the score, and he has to resist the urge to throw his stick onto the ice. To snap it in half over his knee, or pound it on the dirty plexiglass.

Tommy and Tubbo are weaving back and forth around the rink in a near synchronized pattern. There's always at least one of them wide open, ready to receive a pass when the other gets stuck. Skeppy and Bad try to follow along as best as they can, but it proves futile — the Warriors' stick handling skills are too difficult to combat.

On the sidelines after the end of period two, the team looks exhausted. Sweat drips down their foreheads as they guzzle down bottles of chilled water. Inside his helmet, Dream feels breathless.

"They're too..." Bad pants, "fast."

In the other player box, Dream can see the Warriors intently discussing their next game plan. Their faces are nipped and flushed red from the cold, but they don't look worried in the slightest.

Dream takes a big gulp of air. "Then we play faster."

"You really think we can score three points?" Sapnap asks.

"I don't know. Maybe. We have to at least *try*," Dream insists.

The beginning of the third period marks a newfound sense of confidence from the Lions, as well as a change in players. Coach swaps out Skeppy for Sapnap and Ponk for Ant. Heart pounding in his chest, Dream bites down hard on his mouthguard as he skates to the centre of the rink. He rests his hockey stick atop the ice and stares determinedly down, waiting for the puck to drop.

The puck falls. Techno moves first and passes it to Tommy. The Lions swarm around, each trying to follow a different opponent player in hopes that they'll stop any chance of the Warriors passing the puck. Dream grits his teeth. The clock is ticking down, they're running out of time, and the Lions have nothing to show for it.

Play grittier, he tells himself. Be more aggressive.

Mind racing, he's starting to get desperate, and it shows: Techno is driving the puck down the right side of the rink when Dream barrels up behind him. He makes an effort to skate in front and steal the puck away — but instead, Dream accidentally smashes Techno into the wall and hits him hard in the shoulder with his hockey stick.

Immediately, play halts. The referee blows his whistle, and Dream begrudgingly skates off to spend two minutes in the penalty box for high-sticking. Tommy and Tubbo sarcastically shrug their shoulders with matching grins on their faces. Luckily, there are no major injuries, and the game can resume.

Dream scowls. On the sidelines, he watches the Warriors make the most out of their power play, shooting the puck back and forth across the ice to bring it to the Lions' goal. The Lions play on without Dream — Ant and Sam manage to keep the puck away from the net, and when they don't, Callahan blocks every shot with his gloves or knee pads.

At some point, Bad steals the puck away from Tommy and passes it over to Sapnap, who's already near the Warriors' goal. Sapnap skates off with the puck — the defense follows him all the way, the goalie braces himself for the shot — and shoots it with force into the top of the net, just narrowly missing the goalie's helmet.

He scores, it's not enough to push the Lions to victory. The game ends 3-2 when Sapnap scores yet another goal after Dream's two minutes of penalty are up. Sirens blare, and the Warriors huddle around each other to celebrate their win.

After the Warriors break apart and the Lions exchange remarks of *good job* and *we did our best*, Tommy skates towards Dream triumphantly.

"You're off of your game, Dream," he gloats.

"Congratulations, Tommy," Dream says, exasperated. "I... underestimated what you had planned."

"Of course you did." Tommy grins. "We *destroyed* you."

The next day at the ice rink at Northern University, George swings his arms back and forth as he skates in large, looping circles.

"God, I don't know what was *wrong* with me last night," Dream laments.

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know," Dream groans unintelligibly. "I didn't play my best."

It's the night after both the fall invitational and the game. George and Dream are alone on the ice yet again. There's no practice today — except for the two of them, the rink is completely empty. The chill of the surrounding air leaves George pulling the bottom of his figure skating shirt down for warmth.

"It's like, I should've played harder, you know? I was already playing fast and gritty, but I could've been faster. And if I hadn't gotten that penalty... God," Dream rants, gesturing wildly with his hockey stick in hand. "If I hadn't had my stick up, we could've scored one more time, and then we could've gone into overtime and won."

George nods. He's not sure what to say, what words of comfort he can offer Dream when he's going on and on about last night's loss. If anything, the only thing he knows how to do is to simply listen.

"Sapnap played incredibly. But I was off last night, for sure — I mean, the game was so *close* near the end, and I must've been distracted or something," Dream bemoans. "Ugh. I let stupid Tommy get into my head."

The name is unfamiliar to George. "Who's Tommy?"

"Stupid right wing forward from the stupid fucking Langham Warriors. I should've known they trained harder with new strategies after we beat them last time," Dream sighs. He shakes his head, takes a deep breath. "Sorry. Was I talking for too long?"

"No, it's fine," George answers honestly. "You can talk. I'm okay with listening."

Dream nods and tosses his stick back and forth between his hands. He clears his throat. "What about you? How was your figure skating event?"

"It went pretty well." George shrugs and slows to a stop in front of Dream. "I got fourth in the Men's Freeskate category."

"Fourth?" Dream echoes. "Out of what, twenty schools?"

“Fifteen, I think,” George corrects.

And although George can’t see Dream’s face, the smile and pride is evident in his voice when he says: “That’s amazing, George. I’m really happy for you.”

“Thank you,” George replies, smiling. “I think it’s pretty good for my first performance in Canada, right?”

“I think it’s incredible. I don’t even need to see your performance to know that you deserved first place.”

George laughs and looks down to fiddle with the hem of his gloves. “I think I deserved fourth. My performance... could’ve been better. I mean, some of the other skaters there were *really* good. They were flawless, basically.”

“What, and you aren’t?”

George snorts. “Shut up,” he says. “It’s true.”

Dream rests his stick on the ice. Holds it like a cane. And then, confidently: “You should prove it, then.”

George jerks his head back. “Prove it?”

“Prove that you deserved fourth place,” Dream challenges, his exuberant voice echoing throughout the empty stadium. “I wanna see your performance.”

“No,” George resists, awkward. “It’s... embarrassing.”

“Oh, come on. How is it *embarrassing*, George?” Dream scoffs.

“I don’t know, it’s weird.”

Dream tilts his head. “There’s nothing weird about it.”

Something unidentifiable pools in George’s gut, freezing him over from the inside out. It’s one thing to perform in front of a panel of judges; it’s another to perform in front of a friend.

But he’s never backed down from a challenge, and perhaps he’s a little too tired tonight to argue with Dream’s antics — so he swallows his nervousness deep down and says, “Fine.”

He does a few simple stretches to loosen his muscles before stepping off the ice. In the stands, he grabs his phone from his duffle bag and connects it to his portable loudspeaker. George all but shoves the speaker into Dream’s hands — Dream fumbles for a moment, struggling to hold it with his gloves on — and skates off with shaky legs to his starting position.

“Okay, uh, press play,” George calls out.

The music starts. As George turns to pivot on the ice, he’s reminded of how *freeing* figure skating is. It’s easy to get lost in the music and the choreography, even when he’s focused on perfecting each move. A pivot turns to a quick step sequence, then a toe loop jump, and soon the world has completely faded away into oblivion.

There is something special about skating that George loves. It’s not the competitiveness that leaves him mentally drained or the aching joints that follow a performance, and it’s not waking up early and going to bed late after hours of practice. It’s the dizziness he feels when he enters into a rapid

back sit spin. It's the smoothness of gliding across the ice when he moves into a backwards crossover. And it's the feeling of pure weightlessness and joy when he effortlessly lands his Lutz.

But as freeing as it is, it's also methodical and put-together — every turn of the head and motion of the arm has been carefully choreographed and practiced for hours on end.

Sometimes, it's nice to know exactly what's going to happen next.

George approaches a double axel. He glides backwards on the right outside edge of his foot, turns, and takes off with his left forward edge. He turns twice in the air and glides off of the jump with ease. His sharpened skates leave scratches and trails all over the ice.

He runs through the rest of his routine, each step in time with the beat of the crescendoing music. It all ends with a combination spin — from a basic camel, to a catch foot camel, to a basic sit spin, to a final scratch spin.

The music stops.

George is left gasping for air, forehead gleaming with sweat, but it's *worth it* when he turns to Dream and says, between panting breaths:

"How was that?"

Dream nearly drops the speaker — "Be careful with that," George wants to say — before setting it down on the slippery ice and skating over.

"You deserved first," Dream calls out from afar. His voice is slightly muted through his helmet, but George can hear the truthfulness seeping through it anyway. "I'm telling you, George!"

George huffs amusedly. "You haven't even seen any of the other skaters."

"I'm hyping you up right now. Just accept the compliment," Dream says, stopping right in front of him.

George grins and rolls his eyes, looking up at Dream through the tinted visor of his hockey helmet. "Okay, thank you," he relents.

"See, I don't tell *you* that I think I can figure skate, but you tell *me* that you can play hockey," Dream points out.

"I can play hockey," George protests, crossing his arms. "You just need to teach me how."

"Yeah, but you suck," Dream retorts. "You could teach me how to figure skate."

George smiles and shakes his head. "Yeah, yeah. Another time then. When I'm not all sweaty."

Dream gestures to the ice around them. "Wanna split the rink again?"

And who is George to say no?

Chapter End Notes

the boys are back!!

i had combination of personal commitments and writing for other projects (cough cough read my [dnf week fics](#) cough) that took precedence. after dnf week, i lost the writing style that i wanted for this fic, and had to work to find the right voice again. but now i'm back, and hopefully i can come out with more frequent updates!!

i've written in hinting to george that dream = clay but he CANT CLUE IN YET he's not ready

things are going to start to pick up a little more now that we are in the 2/3 part of this fic heheh. something intense happens in the next chapter, just you wait....

as always, let me know if there are any mistakes with the figure skating stuff. that stuff is the hardest to write!

i always feel like i have so much to say in these author's notes. honestly i could talk for hours about this -- so head on over to my [twitter @effervescentlie](#) if you're interested! i post snippets and sneak peeks, plus inside info about my writing process for this fic >:)

leave a comment/kudos if you enjoyed, i love seeing your reactions :)

in-progress novels and baby steps

Chapter Summary

“It’d be easier if you took your hockey stuff off,” George suggests.

Dream’s response is instantaneous: “No.”

George tilts his head, exasperated. “You’re ridiculous.”

“I like my helmet,” Dream insists, and he fiddles with the nylon straps below his ears.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It’s snowing. It’s November and it’s *snowing*, because this is Canada and somehow George has forgotten that snowfall during this time of year can be similar to the snowfall back home in England.

Outside the crystalline windows of the dining hall, light dustings of snow coat cobblestone pathways and grass turned yellow-brown. The wind blows hard and heavy. Within the confines of the dining hall, however, the chill is blocked out.

George sheds his jacket and slings it on the back of his chair. Clay sits across from him, typing intently at his laptop. To George’s right is Sapnap, pursing his lips as he scribbles into his notebook. It’s one of the rare times that all three of them spend lunch together. As soon as George slides into his seat, Sapnap’s head darts up.

“George,” he says, thumping his fist onto the table. “Thank God you’re here.”

“What?”

“Help me with my algebra.”

George chuckles and turns the notebook to get a better view. “A few months ago, you were the one helping *me* with algebra.”

“I’m still good at math,” retorts Sapnap, jerking his notes back. “You could still come to me if you need any help, you know.”

A shrug of the shoulders. “Eh. I don’t need it.”

Clay darts his head up from his screen. “You literally see me in the library at least once a week!”

“But that’s different, though,” George replies, wrinkling his nose. “That’s for English.”

“Yeah, and you can thank me for that grade on your midterms,” quips Clay, already returning his gaze to his laptop.

George huffs and stabs a fork into his stir-fried vegetables.

Sapnap sets his pencil down on the table. “We haven’t gotten to hang out in forever, George. What happened to our movie nights?”

“Midterms,” Clay chimes.

“And skating,” George adds. “I’ve just been *busy*. ”

“Well, there’s no more exams until finals, right? And no figure skating events, either,” says Sapnap.

Through a bite of broccoli, George answers, “Not for a few months.”

Sapnap shivers and shakes his head. “I feel like we’ve been spending way too long at the rink lately. I’m *exhausted* .”

George opens his mouth to sympathize. To relate to Sapnap’s struggles, to say something about the bruises on his legs from practice. Instead:

“Hey, George, are we still on for going to the library after lunch?” Clay interrupts.

George lifts an eyebrow. “Yeah?” He’s confused — their plans were never up for change or debate.

Clay nods and drums his fingers on the trackpad of his laptop.

“Does anyone else hate their roommate?” Sapnap interrupts, pitched. “God, I can’t fucking stand that guy.”

“I do,” George answers quickly. “I have the same problem.”

“No *way*. ”

Clay grins and returns to his quick typing. “My biggest accomplishment is probably never being roomed with you guys.”

Sapnap turns to George with a knowing look, then back at Clay. “That’s fucked up.”

George prepares another forkful of food and says: “True.”

If George knows anything about himself, it’s that he hates Literary Nonfiction. It’s also that he isn’t above complaining.

In their little spot in Willis Library, sat semi-comfortably in carved wooden chairs and lit by the glowy haze of desk lamps, Clay and George sit in comfortable silence. The article George is reading on his laptop is mind-numbingly boring — George thinks that if he has to read one more convoluted line of text, he’s going to explode.

“I hate this,” he announces, unprompted. “Why did my professor make me read this?”

Across from him, Clay looks up from his screen and frowns. “What’s wrong?”

“This is so *boring*. ”

Clay laughs — quiet enough so the students studying next to them aren’t disturbed, but loud enough that only George can hear — and points out, “What *do* you like reading?”

“Not... whatever this is,” says George in disgust, slamming his laptop closed with a little too much force. He slumps backwards and into the warmth of his hoodie. After a moment’s pause, he adds, “I don’t know. I guess I liked Harry Potter as a kid.”

“Is that it?” Clay asks. He pulls the screen of his laptop down. Leans slightly over the desk. Lifts up an eyebrow — he’s got a look of disbelief on his face.

“That’s because Harry Potter is *good*,” George protests. “It’s fun.”

“It’s fun, but it’s basic,” replies Clay. “You need to *read more*, George.”

George groans. “Read what?”

He looks over the table. Clay’s eyes are bright, and there’s the beginnings of a smile growing on his face. George hasn’t known him for long — but he knows him enough to know that Clay has an idea. It’s the twinkle in his eye, the way he visibly perks up. He’s getting excited over something that’s only yet to come.

The question George is asking himself is: will it be a *good* idea?

“You should read my writing,” Clay suggests.

George blinks. “You write?”

Clay nods. Flips his laptop back open, darts his fingers across the trackpad. “Yeah. Class stuff, mostly, but in my free time I do creative writing. Wanna see?”

“Sure,” George says, but Clay’s already turning his laptop around and pushing it over across the desk. Hesitantly, George takes it.

His eyes skim over the screen; it’s a thirty-page long document of Clay’s writing. The text is small, typed carefully line-by-line in a neat serif font.

“Don’t read past the first chapter,” Clay warns, peering over to meet George’s eyes. “I haven’t edited those parts yet.”

George nods. *Chapter One*, the document shouts to him, large and bolded at the top. It beckons him to scroll further. George’s fingers hover over the trackpad, tensed, until he takes a deep breath and begins to read.

It’s as if Clay was determined to prove George wrong, to give him something to read that he knew George would like, because the writing is *good*. George isn’t an expert on writing by any means — hell, the last thing remotely creative that he wrote was a text to his lovely mother back home in England — but even George can recognize the way Clay’s words are quick. Action-packed. Intense. It’s gripping.

George recognizes the genre as something between science-fiction and fantasy novel. As his eyes widen with every passing word, he can hear Clay restlessly drumming his fingers on the desk. For a moment, George glances up to his face. Watches as Clay gnaws on the inside of his cheek, eyes darting around the library.

He seems uncharacteristically nervous. No snarky remarks, no crooked grins or sparkling green eyes. George can understand — he knows the feeling of someone scrutinizing his work all too well.

So then, five minutes and several thousands of words worth of writing later, George pushes the laptop back across the table. He runs a hand through his hair, and says: “I’m done.”

“Yeah? What’d you think?”

“I... actually really liked it,” George confesses, and it’s honest.

The crooked grin returns, etching smooth lines into the smattering of freckles on Clay’s face.

“What, you thought you wouldn’t?”

George laughs, hushed. “I didn’t know you wrote.”

Clay grins as he trails the tip of his finger on the wood grain of the desk. “Well, now you know.”

Begrudgingly, George drags his laptop back towards him and turns it on. The screen roars to life along with the fan — because he’s in university, and everyone knows how financially draining *that* is. A crappy laptop is the least of his problems.

“Are you getting back to work?”

George nods, and with a few clicks, his browser is opened again with the article. He narrows his eyes at the letters facing back at him, determined.

“I’m *going* to finish this,” George insists. “Right now. I’m going to.”

“That’s the attitude,” Clay says.

And George does finish the article. He breezes past line after line, paragraph after paragraph. Reads it a second time over, then a third, and opens up a new document to start taking notes — he’s only on his fifth bullet point when he pauses the clacking of his keyboard and looks back up.

“What are you doing,” George says.

Clay is quite visibly chewing on his nails, but he pulls his fingers out of his mouth guiltily.

“Nothing.”

“Well, it’s not *nothing* .” George frowns.

“It’s just —” Clay starts, and he sighs. “What did you *really* like about my book?”

George glances up, to the side, off at the towering mahogany shelves of the library as he thinks. “Uh, I like the tone. And the pacing was pretty good, too.”

Clay’s eyes light up. “Really?” he asks, and he leans a little closer over the table. “Thank you. I worked hard on that.”

George doesn’t finish taking notes on the article. He keeps his laptop open, but his eyes are focused on the student across from him, talking animatedly about anything from the characters, to the sentence structure, to the plot.

“But no spoilers,” Clay adds solemnly.

George grins and shakes his head. “Of course not.”

George swivels back and forth in his desk chair, tapping his pencil against his binder rhythmically.

His body is stuck in the confines of his dorm room, trapped under piles of coursework and assignments, but his mind is somewhere else; somewhere with the sounds of scraping ice and the occasional skid of a hockey puck.

Classes are over, and there are just a few hours left until he's due to head to figure skating practice. He blinks wearily and looks across the room; Sapnap sits at his own desk, frowning at the lines of code striping his laptop screen.

George considers slumping down into his chair. He decides against it — instead, he thumps his head down onto his desk and closes his eyes.

"Remember when I talked to you about that energy drink?" he asks, desperate. "A few weeks ago?"

He hears Sapnap shift, then spin in his chair. "Yeah?"

"I still want it."

"Get it yourself," Sapnap replies teasingly.

George groans and hides his face in his arms. "The store is *so far away.*"

Sapnap chuckles. "You're so lazy."

"Fuck you," George replies earnestly.

Something sharp and hard hits him on the back — George turns his head to see that Sapnap's thrown a pencil at him.

"Ow," he says, petulant.

"Wake the fuck up, George."

"I have practice today," George laments. "And I woke up at six in the morning. Let me nap."

Sapnap whistles and spins the other way in his chair towards his desk. "Good luck with that."

When figure skating practice ends that night, George is left with sore muscles in his legs and an empty water bottle — as it turns out, he never did get that energy drink.

His routine of staying late after practice continues on. Every weekday, on nights when he'd rather spend time at the rink rather than the stuffiness of his dorm room, he spends an extra hour embracing the chill of the ice. Dream shows up as well, and their time spent bantering over the red centre line of the rink is something that George has started to rely on —

Except for one thing.

George doesn't know what to think of Dream and his helmet. Why Dream chooses to keep his face hidden is still a mystery, despite all the questions George asks on occasion. He reckons he should ask Sapnap about it soon — he'd know something about it, being one of Dream's teammates.

Under dark gloves, George's fingertips tingle from the cold. His typical outfit for practice allows for mobility and comfort, but does little to keep him sheltered from the cold air that kisses his skin with every pump of his skates. His exhaustion from earlier has already melted away — skating always gifts him with a boost of adrenaline.

There's the familiar sound of the gate clacking open. George doesn't try to erase the smile from his face when Dream steps onto the ice.

"George," Dream greets. "You're staying late again? Aren't you tired?"

"And you're arriving early," George points out, arms crossed and fingers tapping on the crook of his elbow.

Dream shuts the gate. "We're both tired, then."

George doesn't respond, eyes trained on the back of Dream's head. The white plastic of his helmet shines under the lights.

"So," Dream says, and he turns around. "Are you sweaty?"

George tilts his head. "Sweaty? No?"

"It's time, George," Dream says, and George can hear the excitement in his voice, "for my figure skating lessons."

George bites back a grin and tilts his head, recalling their previous conversation. "You really want to try?"

"Of course I do," Dream replies. "I can't be *that* bad at it."

"Oh, Dream," George calls, "you're going to regret saying that."

Dream sheds his hockey stick and puck, leaving them on the ice by the gate. He skates towards George at the centre of the rink.

"Teach me something easy," he says. "Something for a beginner."

George racks his brain for the first thing he learned during figure skating lessons as a child. Nights spent at the rink under the strict supervision of his coaches flash in his mind.

"Okay, uh," he starts. "Just... jump."

"Jump?"

"Jump," George repeats, and gestures to Dream's feet.

Hesitantly, Dream bends his knees and jumps into the air — or, rather, he hops, barely, above the ice and lands with wobbling legs.

"What was *that*?" George near-shrieks.

"My coaches never taught me to jump!" Dream protests. "I've never had to *jump* during a game!"

George laughs and says, "Baby steps, Dream. Okay, jump like this."

On one skate, he skates forward, then kicks his other leg forward to hop into the air. He lands on his right toe pick and glides out on his left skate. It's a simple bunny hop — the first jump George remembers learning.

"Your turn," he says.

Here is the difference between ice hockey skates and figure skates: while ice hockey skates have a short, curved blade for executing quick stops and turns, figure skates have a slightly longer blade with a pronounced curve at the front. This curve has a toe pick, a jagged edge on the blade of the skate.

This toe pick is also an essential component for turns, landings, and most importantly, launching into jumps.

So it's no surprise when Dream skates hesitantly into the jump, kicks his right leg forward, and then he's falling backwards towards the slippery ice —

George darts a hand out. His fingers grasp around the fabric of Dream's jersey on his right shoulder, freezing him in midair. Underneath, he can feel the thickness of Dream's shoulder pads. Slowly, George eases Dream back to his feet until he's standing tall.

"Holy shit!" Dream exclaims.

George laughs lightly and pulls away. "Are you okay?"

"I'm good," Dream says. He shudders and pulls the bottom hem of his jersey further down. "What was that?"

George cringes. "I forgot about your skates."

Dream peers down at his feet. Sweeps his eyes towards George's. And yells: "George!"

"I'm sorry!"

"You should be," Dream says, teasingly. "If I broke my leg or something, I'd be in fat *trouble*."

George nods. "Sapnap would kick your ass."

It's not an exaggeration. There's sort of an unspoken dedication amongst the Lions that George has noticed from talking with Sapnap: show up. Play hard. Put your best game forward. And after the Lions recent loss to the Warriors, George knows that they can't afford their captain being put out of commission.

Dream swallows, and George can see the way his throat wavers and bobs. "Is there anything that... doesn't require figure skates?" Dream asks.

Glancing him once over, George takes note of the thick padding hidden under his jersey, the thick material of his hockey pants, the bulky gloves that shield his hands. Hockey is rough. It's quick and it's gritty. People don't play nice when they're in a game, and so their gear shields them like a sort of clunky armour.

People don't play nice in figure skating, either, but that's a discussion for another time, George thinks. And figure skaters don't wear armour for a reason — they restrict mobility.

"It'd be easier if you took your hockey stuff off," George suggests.

Dream's response is instantaneous: "No."

George tilts his head, exasperated. "You're ridiculous."

"I like my helmet," Dream insists, and he fiddles with the nylon straps below his ears. They're buckled tight onto his helmet.

George hasn't gotten a good look at Dream's helmet until now — it's always been from a slight distance, or in the shadows of the stands, or perhaps he simply *hasn't been paying attention* — but now, under the stadium's bright lights and their proximity from George's save, he can see vaguely past the fuzziness of the tinted visor. Not enough to make out any features, unfortunately; Dream's face seems to be an endless void of anonymity and cloudy black. It's unmistakably unique.

"None of the other hockey players have helmets like yours," George remarks. His hand twitches at his side. "Sapnap's is clear in the front."

"That's because this one's mine," Dream says. He raps his knuckles twice on the smooth plastic. "It's custom-made."

"You could just take it off and show me," George replies — he's only half-joking.

"I told you, George. It's my hockey boy persona," Dream says, and he sounds almost amused, voice pitching up in all the wrong places.

Repressing the urge to roll his eyes, George huffs at the repeated excuse.

"I don't even know what that means!" he exclaims. "I just don't understand why you can't take your helmet off."

Dream chuckles. "Does it matter?"

George narrows his eyes. Crosses his arms, tight. "I don't know, Dream, does it?"

"I mean, I don't think it does," Dream scoffs dismissively. George watches with narrowed eyes as Dream's head lolls to the side.

"Stop doing that," George snaps. "You're — you're brushing me off."

Dream sweeps his arm down in the air. "That's not what I'm trying to do, George. You don't understand —"

"I'm trying —"

"I'm telling you, you won't get it!"

George strains. "I'm *trying* to understand, Dream —"

"And it won't work!" Dream shouts, but it wavers and it cracks. Stepping back, he winces, like he's been scalded by the harshness in his own words. He sounds unfamiliar. Dream's voice tells a story, and it feels as if George is still learning how to read between the lines.

Whatever's been brewing in the back of George's mind for months on end — all the casual questions about Dream's helmet, all the Google searches during class — comes to a boil and spills hot all over the ground.

He inhales in an attempt to clear his head with the crisp, cool air. "I just don't *get it*," George insists. "Is there something wrong?"

Dream flexes his fingers, again and again, curling them into tight fists. He looks strange without his stick in hand. Dragging his head up to meet George's gaze, he shakes his head.

"No, George, there's nothing *wrong*." His tone is calmer, softer now. "I just..." He trails off, voice fading into the ambient whirring of the ice rink. It's yet again muted by the confines of his helmet.

George goes quiet too, and he swallows whatever frustration he has left over. His hands twitch yet again at his sides. Desperately, he wants to just reach out, tug the helmet off, and end whatever so-called persona Dream has once and for all.

“I’m just not comfortable,” Dream finishes. Long-gone are his words where George can hear the smiles embedded deep within. He’s cold, clipped. Distant.

George screws his eyes shut. It’s an answer. Not the answer he hoped for, but an answer.

“Okay,” he says, finally.

“Okay?”

“That’s okay,” he repeats. “It’s fine.”

“Are you?” Dream asks, slow. “Fine, I mean.”

“I get it, Dream.” George creases his eyebrows, squinting at Dream’s visor, hoping that it’ll make any difference. “I really — I understand.”

The door to the stadium creaks wide open, and George can already see the horde of hockey players crowding through. The Lions’ coach leads the team towards the ice. Through the barrier, Sapnap frowns at him, as if to ask, *why are you still here?*

“We’re okay, right?” The question pulls George back to the ice, back to Dream standing in front of him. “I’m sorry — I care about you.”

“We’re okay,” George affirms, and he tugs the corners of his lips up into a reassuring smile.

It’s genuine.

Chapter End Notes

hehe . hope this is ok!! i know this is fluff and humour but u gotta have that BALANCE and also this addition of the argument in the last scene was very very last minute but i think this fic just needed something to up the stakes....

comment/kudos/etc. if u enjoyed !!!

[twitter](#)

winter break and subway rides

Chapter Summary

Clay turns his head towards George, and his face is glowing, glowing under shining strings of fairy lights. He tilts his head, offers George that stupid little crooked grin, and George feels his mouth turn sickly sweet.

“It’s like,” he says, staring right into George’s wide eyes, “you take stuff like that for granted. You don’t realize how beautiful things can be until they’re right in front of you.”

George’s breath catches in his throat.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Things don’t snap back to normal immediately.

There’s still the remnants of the words exchanged between Dream and George embedded in the scratches of the ice. They’ll be smoothed away in time, but for now, they remain, stuck deep in the cracks.

George’s eyebrows divot into sharp creases across his forehead as he drags his skate back and forth against the ice. Tiny shards of snow appear from beneath his blades. He clicks his tongue, quiet, and draws his head up.

Dream isn’t here tonight. The clock, high on the scoreboard above the stadium, writes in glowing lights that there’s only an hour more until hockey practice starts. And yet there’s no familiar creak of the rink’s gate, no scraping of wooden sticks on ice. No cackling laughs and no playful teasing.

George attempts to reason with himself. Dream’s not avoiding him, surely — he could be busy with coursework, or sick with a cold (and it’d be understandable; Canadian winters are *harsh*), or off... doing whatever it is that Dream does when he’s not playing hockey.

The thought makes George bite at his bottom lip with a pout. He knows Dream, knows how his smile shines through his voice, how he’s ridiculously tall, how he’s much too confident and competitive for his own good — but George doesn’t *really* know Dream, does he? Has he heard his cackling laugh somewhere else on campus? Learnt anything about what Dream likes, other than hockey?

How much of Dream’s persona is *real*?

There’s no chance for George to ask himself, let alone answer — he’s already storming across the rink and towards the gate. Wobbling slightly when his skates meet rubber instead of smoothed ice, George turns and looks through the dirty plexiglass. Dream’s not there, because of course he isn’t. George isn’t sure why he turned to look in the first place.

The stands are empty and the plastic seats are cold through his pants when George sits down. He pulls his phone out of his duffle bag in the chair next to him and studies his calendar. There’s class

after class, practice after practice, test after test.

“Hi,” a voice says behind him, hesitant.

George whips around. It’s not who he expected, and for that, he’s not sure if he’s happy or not.

“Hello,” he responds, and pats the seat next to him. “Sit.”

Sapnap shuffles around the aisle. He’s not wearing his hockey gear, George notices, and he’s carrying nothing more than his phone and wallet. Hastily, Sapnap stuffs them into his jacket pocket and pushes the folding seat of the chair down as he sits.

“Did you just finish?” he asks.

“Yeah, just about.” George reaches down, twirls the laces of his skate around his finger as he undoes them. “You’re here?”

“I wanted to see my roommate skate for once,” Sapnap quips, and he nudges George in the shoulder. “Before the start of winter break.”

George snorts. “Winter break needs to come faster.”

December marks the beginning of exam season, and after that, two glorious weeks of no classes. The entirety of campus buzzes with excitement; in the library, in the dining hall, in the creaking door frames of Amana Hall, George can hear students chattering about how they *just* need to get through their last few exams, and then they’ll finally be free to see their families for Christmas.

At least, for those who aren’t student athletes.

“One less thing to worry about.” Sapnap cracks his neck left, then right. “Are you seeing your family over the break?”

George shakes his head. “I can’t go home. Practice runs,” he motions with his hands, “right through winter break.”

Sapnap makes a sound of disapproval. “Sheesh, dude, mine too. I just wanna see my family for Christmas.”

“I guess we’ll have to settle for video calls,” George says. He pulls his skates off and switches them out for his regular shoes. “And Christmas dinners together.”

“Christmas dinners together,” Sapnap echoes. He turns his head to look at George, smiling. “I like the sound of that.”

George lets a smile ghost his lips too. It’s the little things, he thinks — talking with Sapnap, spending time at the rink — that cheer him up despite it all. Still, from his place in the stands, overlooking the ice, his mind can’t help but drift, drift drift.

“Have you talked to Dream recently?” he blurts out, fast. It’s more of a demand than a question.

Sapnap purses his lips, drums his fingertips on the tops of his knees. “Have you?”

George wants to lie. He wants to tell Sapnap that he and Dream have never been better — but they’ve been roommates for long enough, and friends for just as long. George isn’t stupid. He knows that Sapnap would see right through him.

“I haven’t,” George starts, and he groans. “I think I fucked up bad, Sapnap.”

“You couldn’t have fucked up *that* bad, George,” Sapnap insists. He knocks George’s ankle with his foot, gentle and teasing. “What’d you do?” he asks — there’s a knowing look on his face.

“Have you ever seen Dream outside of hockey?” George gestures around them. “Have you ever seen him outside of this building?”

Sapnap doesn’t answer, for a moment — he bites down at his bottom lip, then sighs. “I haven’t.”

“Really?”

“I haven’t,” Sapnap repeats, and George thinks it’s the most honest thing he’s heard in days. “Remember way back, when I asked Dream to come get dinner with the team? When you first transferred here?”

Of course George remembers — how could he forget? The memory sits clear as day in the front of his mind. It was the same night where George first asked Dream about his helmet, the first night where Dream had made his excuses. George nods, and Sapnap continues on.

“He’s always been like that. You know, never coming out with me and the team. But he’s a good fucking guy, George, and a good fucking player. He’s always showing up to practice an hour early and staying an hour late. That’s why we trust him to be captain.”

“I know,” George mumbles, tracing figure-eights onto his thighs.

“The team and I are going to hang out next week, too, and he said no again. I don’t know. He’s just... really private like that.” Sapnap quickens his incessant finger-drumming. “More than you.”

“Shut the fuck up,” George protests at the insult, grinning, and he knocks his knee against Sapnap’s. “You’re the worst, Sapnap, genuinely.”

“You love me,” Sapnap quips back. “I know you do.”

And George would never admit it, would never give Sapnap the satisfaction, but he does. It’s the way he’s able to lift George’s spirits with nothing more than his presence, and the way George says something snarky right back, and then they’re both smiling, because they’ve only known each other for a few months but they’re already best fucking friends.

George claps his hands down on his knees and as he stands, his legs ache. He slings his bag across his shoulders. “I’m going home.”

“What?”

“I’m leaving you here,” George calls out, already making his way to the door. “And I’m barricading the door behind me so you can’t get in.”

“No! What the hell,” Sapnap exclaims. He springs up to his feet and jogs after George so he can catch up. “I’m following you back.”

“No,” George parrots, “you can sleep in the hallway outside.”

“Why are you so *mean* ?”

On the walk home, duffle bag bumping against George’s hip with every step, laughter and profanities bubble up from his throat with every one of Sapnap’s teasing remarks.

And, when Sapnap shoves an energy drink into George's hands back at their dorm, telling him that he "looks like he could definitely fucking use one right now" — George simply grins and flips him off.

George runs himself ragged all throughout his exams. He gets through all his computer science-related finals through late nights studying with Sapnap, and Clay tutors him through his literary nonfiction final essay.

It feels like salvation when he walks out of his last exam, and it's the day after that when winter break arrives with a bang — literally.

Clay hits his fist on the table, and George's water bottle jumps at the sudden bump. "What the hell do you mean, George?"

"What the hell do *you* mean," George retorts. "Shush."

The sun shines bright outside the window, casting the library in a gentle golden glow. There's the occasional shuffle of papers and quiet chatter. Amidst looming mahogany bookshelves, Clay sets his hands down on the mahogany desk, leans over, and hisses:

"What do you mean you've never been off campus?"

George shrugs. "I don't know, I've just never been."

"You've been here for months and you haven't seen the city?" Clay asks, incredulous. He presses his hands harder onto the desk. "Come on, George. Seriously?"

George blinks. "Is this not the city?"

"Well, I mean, I *guess* it is," Clay allows, tilting his head. "But you haven't seen the *real* city. You haven't been anywhere further than the coffee shop.."

Northern University sits snug amongst towering buildings and bustling streets. George had seen bits and pieces of downtown while travelling between the airport and campus, but he hasn't walked along cracked sidewalks, hasn't visited any of the smaller, quainter neighbourhoods nearby.

George lived in the city, before — London. He doesn't see the appeal.

"I've never had a reason to go," he protests.

Clay scoffs and settles back into his chair. The wooden legs scrape quietly against the floor. "You don't need a reason to go, George, you just go because it's fun to walk around."

George scrunches up his nose. "What?"

"It's like," Clay starts, before he cuts himself off with a sigh. "It's like going to the mall, or something. You go there to walk around, and look at the clothes, and buy a drink from the food court, but you don't *actually* get anything." He explains it like it's common knowledge, like it's something that everyone does except for George.

"That's so *weird*," George expresses, frowning. He shakes his head. "And even if I wanted to, I haven't had time to go to the city."

"It's winter break," says Clay. The glimmer in his eye returns. "Don't you have the time now?"

The next week, George leaves his dorm room with a wave and a promise to Sapnap that he'll be back later that night. Sapnap had mumbled a half-hearted "where are you going", clearly too engrossed in reading another one of the zombie comics he keeps tucked under his mattress, and George had simply told him that he was heading out into the city.

"I'll be back..." George starts, "I don't know when. I'll be back."

"Have fun," Sapnap says, flipping to the next page of his comic. "But not too much fun. Text me when you're coming home."

"It's not that kind of fun," George replies, but it falls on deaf ears. He steps halfway out the door, and calls out, "Bye."

"Bye," Sapnap replies.

When he opens the door to Amana Hall, the wind hits George right in the face. He pulls his knitted hat out of his pocket and slips it on as he begins to make his way off campus.

Following his phone to the nearest subway station — or, as George prefers to call it, the underground — is easy despite a few wrong turns. When he finds it and steps down the concrete steps, down into tunnels that run deep beneath the city, Clay is already there. He's staring down at his phone by the wall, yet not touching it. George supposes it makes sense. The city is dirty.

"Hey," says Clay, looking up as soon as he spots George. "Ready to go?"

George nods, and he watches as Clay pockets his phone in his thick jacket pocket. He's fully dressed for the winter — jacket, scarf, boots and all — and it makes George wonder where he's about to take him.

The air is stuffy here, so George pulls his hat off of his head as the two begin to walk. Their boots thump atop the tiled subway flooring. "Where are we going?"

"Ehh," Clay sounds, shrugging, and he turns to George with a grin. "You'll see."

"That doesn't help," George protests.

"You'll see it later, George, trust me," Clay says, much too self-assured. "Look, hurry up and buy your ticket."

He points at the ticket machine nearby, and George shoots him a suspicious glare before walking off to insert his card and jab at the electronic screen. He fumbles slightly, fingers covered by his gloves, but it works eventually and the ticket machine prints him off a thin white sheet that grants him the incredible power of riding the subway for the rest of the day.

"My ticket has been acquired," George announces. He waves the slip of paper in the air.

Clay grins. "Let's go."

George follows him through the electronic turnstiles, further down the stairs, and into the subway station tunnels. The floors and walls are grimey — cleaner than he expected, but still grimey — and when the subway pulls up in front of them, sliding its doors open with a gentle announcement over the speakers, the two step inside.

It's a few hours after rush hour, but the subway car is still practically full. They find a spot to stand by the door, gripping onto the smooth metal pole, and Clay leans down slightly to say something in

George's ear.

"We're riding the subway," he says, excitedly. "It doesn't get much more city than this."

"Shut the fuck up," George tells him. "That was a joke, right? We aren't spending all night here?"

Clay scoffs. "Of course not. This is only the beginning, George."

"You're so dramatic," George says, and he shoots him an accusatory glance.

Clay shakes his head, smiles, and stands up straight again.

The subway moves on.

When George and Clay emerge from the subway a while later, the sky is pitch black. A cold breeze cuts across George's nose, and he shivers. The streets here are much less cramped; he can see the city's towering buildings are far off in the distance, mere silhouettes in the winter air, but Clay tells him that this is still part of the city — just a different area.

"Come on, follow me," he says, beckoning George down the sidewalk.

George quirks up an eyebrow. Taps Clay up high on the shoulder. "Are you going to tell me where we're going now?"

Clay screws up his mouth in thought. "It's this winter festival thing," he explains, stuffing his hands into his pockets. "I've been, like, once last year. It's not really the city experience, but it's off campus. So I thought it'd be fun."

The entrance to the festival is grand — there's a massive arch, all lit up with twinkling LEDs and framed with towering pine trees. George rubs at his nose, already running slightly from the cold.

Inside, the winter festivities are in full swing. The air smells faintly of chocolate and wood fires. Tiny storefronts scattered at the sides of the path are lit with the glowy haze of lanterns. Garlands twist around lamp posts and tall oaks, and festival-goers swaddled in thick coats walk atop snow-dusted cobblestone floors.

"There's so many people here," George comments, and Clay smiles and shakes his head.

"It's the Christmas spirit, George," he says. "Can we get a picture with Santa?"

George pulls a face, something between amusement and confusion. "What?"

"You're never too old to get a picture with Santa."

George snorts. "No, but he might look at you a bit weird when you try to sit in his lap."

Clay cracks a face-splitting grin. "*What?* What the fuck is wrong with you?" he asks. His tone is all lighthearted, and they both chuckle.

Walking deeper and deeper into the festival, George bites down on his bottom lip. He doesn't like the lack of conversation, doesn't like how he's hearing Christmas music in his ears instead of shuffling papers and gentle typing.

"Speaking of Christmas," he starts, "Are you staying here at school for the break?"

“I am,” Clay says, shrugging his shoulders. “Travel’s expensive.”

George nods. “Me too.”

Snow crunches under their boots. Clay sighs and drives his hands a little deeper into his pockets.

“Don’t you miss home?” His voice is tender, genuine, and it prompts George to elaborate more.

“London sucks, but I miss it anyways,” he voices. “I miss my family, and my cat, and my dog.”

Clay quirks the corners of his lips up. “Tell me about your cat,” he says.

“He’s grey with black stripes, and he’s got big brown eyes,” George describes.

“What else?”

“He likes to play with the laces on my skates — I used to dangle them in front of him, and he’d just paw at them for hours,” George says, and he mocks the motion with his hands. The memory makes him feel fuzzy on the inside. “He liked chewing on them, too. I used to have tiny bite marks on all my laces, and I had to replace them, like, every few months.”

“And you let him?”

“It was cute,” George admits. “What about you?”

“I have a cat back home, too. Her name is Patches, and I cried like a baby when I had to leave her behind. If my dorm let me have pets, I probably would’ve dragged her here with me in her little carrier,” Clay says — then he clamps his mouth shut and laughs forcedly. “That’s kind of embarrassing, but whatever.”

“Don’t be embarrassed,” George reassures, and he sighs. “I miss the weather back home, too. I used to love it because it was so rainy.”

“I like the rain,” Clay voices. “It’s nice, when you’re in your room, sitting in bed all warm.”

“Yeah,” George says, “or like, with a blanket and my computer. And the *snow*,” George gasps. “It snows in London, but it doesn’t snow nearly as much as here.”

Clay tilts his head, contemplating, and nods. “I like the snow. I mean, I’m from Florida. It doesn’t snow there — so when I moved up north, I learned to appreciate the snow a lot more. It’s special.”

“Even the gross parts?” George asks in disbelief. “Like, the ugly grey slush on the roads.”

Clay laughs. “Okay, maybe not that part. But the snow can be really pretty. Like with blizzards. Yeah, they suck, and then you have to walk through two feet of snow,” he says, and George smiles, “but the snow gets all crystallized and it looks like it’s *sparkling*. ”

“I know what you mean,” George says. He can imagine the scene in his head — untouched crystalline snow, slightly frozen-over, glistening in the winter sun. The bright white snow is blinding.

Clay turns his head towards George, and his face is *glowing*, glowing under shining strings of fairy lights. He tilts his head, offers George that stupid little crooked grin, and George feels his mouth turn sickly sweet.

“It’s like,” he says, staring right into George’s wide eyes, “you take stuff like that for granted. You

don't realize how beautiful things can be until they're right in front of you."

George's breath catches in his throat.

Clay purses his lips, then casts his gaze back down to his snow boots. "Or, I don't know, something like that."

"Something like that." George shrugs. He coughs, and the exhale releases a puff of fog into the air.

In the window of one of the little shops they pass by, George catches his reflection. His face and nose are flushed, and he's not sure whether the sudden heat in his cheeks is from the cold or something else.

He elects to ignore it.

"Look," says Clay, pulling his hand out of his jacket pocket. He points forward. "Have you tried any hot chocolate yet?"

Sure enough, there's a tiny stand serving steaming cups of hot chocolate a little further down the pathway. There's a rich, dark chocolate smell wafting through the air.

"Here? No," George confesses.

"*What?* George, you have to try," Clay insists.

The scent only gets stronger the closer they get, and when the workers behind the stand hand Clay two tall, scalding hot paper cups, Clay passes one to George. Their hands brush; the heat from the cup and Clay's hands warms George's numb fingers and thaws them from the biting cold.

"Try," Clay says.

George takes a small sip, tentative — the temperature burns at his tongue and leaves it tingling, but the creamy chocolate flavour lingers in his mouth for far longer. The sickly sweet taste from earlier is long gone. George smacks his lips; they taste faintly of peppermint.

"It's hot," he says, and he holds the cup up, "but it's pretty good."

"Only pretty good?" Clay teases.

George rolls his eyes and kicks at the snow on the ground — it sends fluffy chunks forward that hit right against Clay's snow boots. "It's good, I don't know what else to say!"

Clay merely laughs. "Is it better than your British hot chocolate?"

"Mm," George hums, "no."

"There's no way," Clay asserts, shaking his head. "You're biased as hell, George."

George takes another sip. The sweetness warms him from the inside out, and he clutches at the cup with both hands to relish in the heat. It does taste better than the hot chocolate back home, but George would never admit it. He grins. "I know."

Clay doesn't say anything, but he smiles back — and George stares determinedly down at his cup. It feels strange: the two of them, hanging out together on *purpose*. Outside of the library, outside of the coffee shop where they'd bumped into each other. There's no need to keep their voices hushed

here, in the bustling festival.

“How’s your writing going?” George blurts.

“My novel?” Clay asks, and George nods. “It’s... It’s going,” he chuckles.

“*It’s going,*” George mocks in a horrible, squeaking voice.

Clay tsks, teasingly. “Hey, you should understand how hard writing is.”

“You’re meant to be good at writing, though!”

“If it were that easy, I’d be finished by now.”

“Makes sense,” George remarks. He turns away. “You already know, I don’t know anything about that kind of stuff.”

He doesn’t expect Clay to answer, really — he looks far too busy nursing his cup. “But you’re smart,” he replies, out of nowhere.

George’s eyes widen. “Thank you?”

“You’re welcome,” Clay says earnestly, and suddenly George feels very warm despite the biting cold. “It’s true, by the way.”

A beat.

“Go on,” George prompts.

Clay laughs and takes another sip of his hot chocolate. “You... you’re very humble about yourself. You’re good at computer science, but you don’t brag about it.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah,” Clay says. He pushes him in the arm gently. “You need to give yourself more credit, George.”

George frowns. Knits his eyebrows together. “I do?”

“You’re talented,” Clay tells him. “You’re good at stuff.”

“Keep going,” George encourages, grinning. “This is all very true. What kind of stuff?”

“Math, science. And, uh, skating. All that,” Clay says. He scratches at his jaw; George observes the light smattering of freckles underneath.

“Wow, Clay,” George teases. “I didn’t know you felt that way about me.”

“Shut up,” Clay mumbles, burying his lips into the plastic lid of his hot chocolate.

Soon, the grey sky fades into black, and the warm yellow lights fade into pretty shades of blue. With the sun gone, the chill picks up a little bit more — so George zips up his jacket higher and curls his fingers tight around his cup. The storefronts and tiny stands trickle away until they’re replaced with bright, glowing LEDs shaped like polar bears and icicles and life-sized gingerbread houses, and it’s *beautiful*. Clay comments on every statue and decoration they pass by, pointing and exclaiming, and George just can’t help but feel impossibly warmer.

In the corner of one part of the festival, surrounded by lit-up Christmas trees and candy cane shaped lights, a little boy with floppy brown hair wobbles on his clunky skates. His parents guide him to the ice with a gentle hand, and George watches as the boy nearly slips — before catching himself and beginning to skate warily. Around him, other skaters glide by.

“There’s an ice rink,” George comments, and he hasn’t even realized that he’s said it out loud until Clay clears his throat.

“You want to skate?”

George considers it for a moment, then shakes his head. “No. I spend... all day thinking about skating, and then all night actually skating.” He tears his gaze away from the rink and onto Clay’s green eyes, sparkling under the twinkling lights. “Another time, maybe.”

Ticking up an eyebrow, Clay asks, “Next Christmas?”

“Next Christmas,” George echoes. “Next year.”

Eventually, the people at the festival start to shuffle out and George’s hot chocolate turns cold. The later into the night it gets, the nippier the wind becomes — Clay tugs on a pair of gloves, George pulls his hat further down his ears.

“It’s getting late,” George announces. “We should leave.”

“Yeah,” says Clay, and he clears his throat. “Ready to take the subway back?”

George scrunches up his nose. “Don’t you hate that thing?”

Clay laughs. “I do, but there’s no way in hell I’m *walking* home.”

On the ride back to campus, the subway car is empty.

They sit next to each other.

Chapter End Notes

FUCKKCKSJ okay so funny story: i tweet out spoilers for this fic on my twitter and i tweeted out the part where i wrote "George whips around. It's not who he expected, and for that, he's not sure if he's happy or not" unaware that it sounded like The Big Reveal Scene and if u saw that and u thought it was coming this chapter, I am so so sorry it was an ACCIDENT i didnt realize it sounded that way until someone (hello hehe) told me afterwards LMAOO

i love writing sapnap and george they are so fun and we are getting more hints leading up to the big reveal?!

anyways. christmas fluff in june to soothe the soul after that last chapter. hope u enjoyed and sorry this took a while -- turns out when you're employed you actually have to go to work?! who would've thought lol

[twitter](#)

bets and wagers

Chapter Summary

The puck freezes atop the ice. George poses the question in his mind, lines the words up with his tongue — and shoots.

“What do you consider a date?”

Dream doesn’t move. His stick loosens in his grasp, and it tips over a little closer towards the ice. “What?”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

For the rest of winter break, time flies by — George goes to practice, catches up on sleep, and spends Christmas with Clay and Sapnap in Amana Hall’s common room. He calls his family, and they insist that he stays on call for a few hours longer so that his mother can fawn over how he’s been eating and his siblings can flip the camera around to show off the family pets.

It’d be only natural that he’d see Dream after figure skating practice, hobbling through the door in his skates and clunky gear, but he doesn’t show up. It makes George feel sick, almost, and sets a heavy pit of worry in his stomach that weighs him down with each jump he attempts.

For now, though, university life continues — and so when classes start up again on the first Monday after the new year, George finds himself sitting in the dining hall for dinner with Sapnap across from him.

“You idiot,” Sapnap says, “you absolute *fucking* idiot.”

George blinks. “What?”

“You are such a dumbass, George.”

“*What?*” George exclaims.

Sapnap sighs and slams his fork into his bowl with more force than necessary. “You went on a *date* over winter break and you didn’t tell me?”

“What? What do you mean?”

“And to think I was here, sitting in my bed, reading my comics while my two best friends were out having fun,” Sapnap groans. “You two make me sick.”

“With Clay? It wasn’t a date,” George tells him, but Sapnap’s eyes only grow wider.

“Oh my God, and I told you to *not have too much fun*. I knew, somehow. I’m psychic,” he gasps.

“No you aren’t,” George snaps, yet not unkindly. “It wasn’t a date.”

Sapnap scoffs and crosses his arms. “Dude, it totally was. You hung out, just the two of you.”

“As *friends*!”

“More like friends with benefits,” Sapnap retorts, and George reaches over the table to smack him in the arm. “Ow!”

“What is wrong with you?” George shrills. He pulls back into his chair and huffs. “Say whatever you want Sapnap, but it’s not like that.”

“It’s *exactly* like that, you dumbass. You told me yourself — you went on a date with Clay. You flirted with each other and everything,” Sapnap asserts. A horrified look crosses his face. “Oh, I’m going to be the third wheel now, aren’t I?”

“We went out *once*,” George replies, exasperated. “He doesn’t like guys, anyway.”

“You don’t know that,” Sapnap tells him, raising his eyebrows. “Even I don’t know that.” He clears his throat. “Do *you* like guys?”

George narrows his eyes. “Maybe,” he says, and then quickly tacks on, “but it doesn’t matter either way, because I’m telling you that it wasn’t a date.”

“And I’m telling you that it *was*,” insists Sapnap. “Next time I see Clay, I’m asking him whether or not he meant for it to be a date.”

“You wouldn’t,” George retorts, and Sapnap grins devilishly.

“I would,” he replies. “You underestimate me, George.”

George looks down as he shovels a heaping portion of rice onto his spoon. “Whatever,” he scoffs. “Just so you know, he’s going to say no anyways.”

“Wanna bet on that?”

George freezes mid-bite — briefly, but it’s there — and he considers Sapnap’s challenge. There’s no way that Clay says yes because there’s no way in hell that he likes guys. George has been burned before by boys back home in England, boys who left him in tears with a shattered heart. Clay will say no.

“How much are you betting?” George says, slowly. He sets his spoon down in contemplation, so sure that he’ll win, that he’s genuinely considering the bet.

Sapnap hums; there’s a terribly mischievous look on his face. “Fifty bucks,” he proposes. “Take it or leave it.”

George scrunches up his nose. “Twenty-five,” he counters, and he scoffs. “I’m not made of money, Sapnap.”

“*Thirty* -five.”

It’s a shitty bet, plain and simple — Sapnap wants to plant some seed of hope in George’s mind that Clay is interested in him, and it’s not going to work. But thirty-five dollars is thirty-five dollars, before he can think too hard about it, George says:

“Deal.”

Reaching a hand over the table, they shake on it. Sapnap’s grip is strong, determined, and George grips back harder. The adrenaline from their competitiveness zips through their veins, and when

neither of them want to let go of the handshake first, George scowls as he pulls his arm back. Sapnap is much too stubborn for his own good.

“Get ready to lose,” says Sapnap, looking much too confident for someone who doesn’t even know if Clay likes boys.

George grins back. Tries to ignore the way his hands have gone clammy. “You wish.”

It’s that night that George goes to figure skating practice. The winter invitational and the figure skating championships are coming up quickly — the invitational is in just a few weeks, and the championships are at the end of February — so his coaches encourage him to do a little more practice outside of the rink and to keep working on his routine. The cold is numbing, and it’s easy for George to forget about everything — school, family, Sapnap and his stupid bet — when he’s on the ice.

It goes like this: George is practicing his fiftieth double axel of the night and his legs *ache*. His feet are already all bruised up, sure to be sore tomorrow morning. He’d been told to keep working at his landing, something about wobbling ever so slightly when he’d skate out of the jump, and after watching back video footage of him doing the axel, he’d agreed with his coaches that it needed a bit of improvement.

George glides backwards and turns carefully, preparing to launch himself into the jump. The takeoff on his left forward edge is strong; he kicks through with his free leg and makes two full revolutions in the air, landing on his right skate — and he wobbles. The jump isn’t elegant or precise in the slightest.

Gliding out, George sighs and comes to a stop. He purses his lips, fidgeting at the hem of his gloves. He supposes it’s good enough for tonight; the scoreboard tells him that it’s nearly time to head home, but then —

Clunk.

George hasn’t heard that sound in ages. He whips around, fully expecting the noise to have been a hallucination from his fit of tiredness — but there, standing in the gate in all his tall, helmeted glory, is Dream.

They don’t move for a moment. Dream goes quiet, and all George can hear is the ambient noise of the rink, the sound of his beating heart. It’s tense; the cold air goes colder. Goosebumps prick at George’s skin. He can only choke out an embarrassing:

“Oh. It’s you.”

The silence is broken, and Dream chuckles. Turns to close the gate. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Nothing,” George rushes to answer. “Just that I haven’t seen a lot of you recently.”

The gate shuts; they’re locked inside together alone. George stares into the shaded darkness of Dream’s helmet. “I know,” says Dream. “I’m sorry about that.”

George exhales and watches as the puff of air escapes his lips. It’s been so, so long, and Dream is finally back. He doesn’t want to argue anymore, he wants to put the past behind them, and he grins. “So, what’s your excuse? You haven’t been practicing as much as usual.”

“You sound like my coach,” Dream remarks; George can nearly hear him rolling his eyes under his helmet. “I don’t have an excuse, unfortunately, but I’ll stay extra late tonight, and show up earlier next time.”

Next time. It’s not a promise, but it feels like one. George bites back a wider smile — things are better since the last time they spoke, and for that, he’s thankful.

Dream skates forward, and when he comes to a halting stop in front of George, tiny shards of ice splatter onto his figure skates. “What’ve you been up to?” Dream asks — the hockey stick he’s holding bounces back and forth between his hands, restless.

George narrows his eyes and smirks. “Don’t you need to get back to practicing?”

Cocking his head to the side, Dream scoffs. “Seriously? I haven’t been on the ice with you in weeks and you want to get rid of me already?” He reaches over to poke George in the shoulder. “You really do put too much pressure on yourself, George.”

“I do not,” George protests, but it sounds flat even to him. Dream jabs him again, harder, and he finally relents. “Fine. Want to see what I’ve been working on?”

“Obviously,” Dream says — it’s haughty, but only teasingly.

The ice in the rink is already scratched up from practice earlier, but George takes his position at the left side of the rink nonetheless. He’s been working on the double axel all night, but it never seems to stop intimidating him. Across the rink, Dream nods expectantly, and George takes a deep breath.

He approaches the jump, gliding backwards on his right outside edge. Turns to face forward. Takes off into the jump on his left foot, rotates twice in the air — the cold air of the ice rink nips at his nose — and he lands on his right back outside edge, strong. A smile works its way onto his face before he can help it.

George glides out on his right skate, left leg outstretched behind him, and huffs in satisfaction at his landing. He’ll have to work on it more until he can land it consistently, of course, but he’s finally done it in a way that he can be proud of.

Pivoting to face Dream, he opens his arms and grins. “So,” he says, “any thoughts?”

Dream laughs. “Many thoughts,” he says. “It’s probably way harder than it looks.”

“It is,” George agrees readily. “It’s the hardest jump in the entirety of figure skating, and it’s two rotations in the air instead of just one.” He shrugs his shoulders. “It’s the same jump I was doing when I first met you. I still haven’t been able to land that triple axel, by the way, and I’m pretty sure it’s your fault,” he teases.

It takes a moment for Dream to recall the memory, and he twirls his stick in his hands as he speaks: “The time I scared you so badly that you fell over?”

George recoils. “Don’t remind me of that. I think I still have bruises on my ankles from that, you know.”

Dream’s shoulders shake with laughter. “You’re such an idiot, George.”

George rolls his eyes lightheartedly, kicking his feet back and forth across the ice. Piles of snow appear beneath the blades of his skates. He doesn’t feel the need to fill up the silence, strangely;

it's comfortable.

"Do you want to do hockey then, instead of skating tonight?" Dream asks, and George nods. "I'll go grab you another stick from the back."

Dream skates off, disappearing behind the gate. The rink settles into silence once again. George knows Dream's meant to be practicing and getting the rink ready for when the rest of the hockey team arrives later that night, but he's instead listening to George talk. It unfurls something unfamiliar in George's chest — something warm.

When Dream returns with a left handed hockey stick — he had remembered that George was left handed, and George had smiled — the two take positions on opposite sides of the middle line, passing Dream's puck back and forth.

"What'd you do over winter break?" George asks. Clumsily, he adjusts his stick behind the puck before passing it over the line.

Dream catches it with the blade of his stick. "Nothing much," he says, lining up his shot, "Mostly stayed home and met up with friends." He sends the puck back towards George. "What about you?"

The puck goes a little too far — George has to skate away from the centre of the rink to catch it — and as he turns away from Dream, he recalls his weeks of break. They were uneventful for the most part, filled with late nights on the ice or nights watching Netflix in his dorm — but Sapnap's bet from earlier today sits at the forefront of his mind. It's a stupid deal, really, and it's a little bit cruel of Sapnap to try to give George the false hope that Clay might be interested in him, but now that he hasn't got the axel to distract him, George can't stop thinking about the bet. The winter festival. Clay.

The date — or, whatever it was meant to be.

"I went out with a friend, I guess? That was pretty much it," George answers. He turns, slowly. Takes a moment to think — if anything, all he wants is to prove himself *right*, prove that the entire thing was platonic — and skates back towards the centre line, along with the puck.

Dream looks impatient. His hockey stick is held tight in his hands, waiting for the pass.

Instead, the puck freezes atop the ice. George poses the question in his mind, lines the words up with his tongue — and shoots.

"What do you consider a date?"

Dream doesn't move. His stick loosens in his grasp, and it tips over a little closer towards the ice. "What?"

"I made this bet with Sapnap," George rushes to explain. "I hung out with a friend over winter break, and he's convinced that it was meant to be a date." He passes the puck to Dream. He's slow to react, for a moment — the puck nearly slides right past his stick — but Dream darts out his arm in time to stop it.

Dream coughs. "What did you do?" He asks, and sends the puck right back over the line.

"We just walked around with hot chocolate and talked," George answers, shrugging. It's getting harder for him to return the puck this time, trying to match Dream's rhythm, but he manages to pass it back. The puck lands right in front of Dream's expectant stick.

Dream shoots it back as soon as it arrives, and George has to scramble to stop it from sliding too far. “I don’t know,” he answers, words slow and deliberate, “it depends on, like, a lot of other things.”

“Oh,” George says. He’s not sure what else he can say to that — it’s a vague answer, through and through, and gnawing at the inside of his cheek, he pushes the puck back over.

“Do you think it was a date?”

The puck is sent back. It clatters against the blade of George’s hockey stick, almost mockingly, like it knows. Knows how much of a bombshell that question was, knows how it presses a sense of responsibility to *think* and *answer*, and George frowns. He didn’t even consider the possibility until Sapnap’s stupid bet — and now that Dream is acting so ambiguously, he’s second-guessing himself.

“I don’t know, Dream, that’s why I’m asking *you*,” George exclaims, straightening his legs. Then, unhelpfully: “The bet’s for thirty-five dollars,” he adds, nudging the puck away from him.

It drags itself across the ice — slow, unbearable, painstaking — barely making its way over the thick centre line. Lazily, Dream moves his leg forward, and the puck bounces gently off of the thickness of his hockey skates.

“Thirty-five dollars is a lot of money,” he says, dumbly.

George bites back a laugh. “You didn’t answer my question.”

“That’s because,” Dream teases, barely audible under his helmet, “I don’t have an answer.” He lines up his pass again, knees bent, and shoots — the puck darts across the ice and lands at George’s feet.

George sighs. “Just forget I asked,” he replies, pushing it back with as little effort as possible.

Dream takes a deep breath. Stands his hockey stick straight up, ignores the black disc sitting by his skates. It’s easier to exchange the puck back and forth rather than words, George supposes — and for Dream, that’s unlike him.

“Sapnap’s an idiot,” Dream says finally, and he chuckles. “Don’t listen to him, listen to what you think is right.”

George huffs, something between a laugh and a sigh. “I know,” he says.

The puck zips across the ice, frictionless, and George’s readied hockey stick catches it just in time. With that, he takes a deep breath, lines up his pass — and shoots.

Sapnap is late.

Sapnap is incredibly, incredibly late, and George is stuck waiting at Willis Library waiting for his roommate — and now, study partner — to show up for their planned study session. He purses his lips. Taps his pen against his notebook, his eyes darting between the grand, wooden doors leading outside — but there’s no movement.

They had agreed to meet up a few nights earlier to start studying for the new semester (at Sapnap’s idea!), and George had suggested the library as a good meeting spot. It’s quiet when the shuffle of papers and clacking keyboards are tuned out — peaceful, almost. George knows it well, thanks to

hours spent exchanging hushed whispers with Clay between bookshelves filled with biographies and non-fiction books.

Frowning, George casts a glance outside the window. Winter sunshine streams through, weaving its way between spindly tree branches and past wrought iron lamp posts. The snow on the ground is half-frozen over and crystalline in the sun. It's beautiful, it's untouched, and it's blinding — the bright white hurts George's eyes, and he's forced to pull away.

Sapnap's whereabouts are still unknown. George is about to pull out his phone from his bag to text him, when the sound of footsteps appear from behind him.

George turns around in his chair, and he's immediately greeted by the sight of Sapnap's apologetic face. He's got his backpack slung across one shoulder and a plastic bag held in one of his hands. Quickly, Sapnap slips around the table and takes a seat across from George.

"Sorry," he whispers, setting his backpack on the seat beside him, "got held up with something. I got you something, though," he offers — and out of the plastic bag, he pulls out two cans of energy drink. "One for each of us."

They aren't really meant to be drinking those kinds of things in the library, but George is much too tired to care for the rules. He slides his can over the table. The drink is cold to the touch; condensation forming on the sides of the can leaves little trails of water on the desk. "What took you so long?"

"I was talking to someone," Sapnap answers, unhelpfully.

George drums his fingers on the tab of the can. "Who?"

"Clay," Sapnap replies. "And I've got an update about our bet, you know."

George's fingers freeze.

Chapter End Notes

shorter chapter today, where the boys deal with the consequences of winter break !!
hope u enjoyed nonetheless, the puck passing scene was so fun to write (i talked a little bit about it on my [twitter](#)) because the puck was very representative of their emotions if that makes sense?

there's a callback to the last chapter in this one during the last scene and that wasn't planned at all i just thought of it and knew it had to go in!

hope u enjoyed <3 lots of love,
effy effervescentlies

study groups and jerseys

Chapter Summary

“Hey,” Dream says, muffled again with the way his mouthguard’s sitting heavy in his mouth, beneath the helmet. The smile is audible in his voice when he says, “Got something for you.”

George frowns, a little surprised. “You did?”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Here is the thing about George: he doesn’t exactly wear his heart on his sleeve.

It’s how he’s always been, really — when he’d come near last in his very first figure skating competition as a child, his parents had ruffled his neatly combed brown hair and promised him an ice cream cone to make up for it. They’d spent the rest of the day in the city, tucked inside a tiny ice cream parlour somewhere along London’s winding cobblestone streets, and watched as the sun set over the horizon.

It wasn’t until George had gone to bed for the night, after his mother had swept his hair out of his eyes and pressed a gentle kiss to his forehead, that the events of the day had truly set in.

Lying in the darkness of his bedroom and staring at his ceiling was a dangerous combination for George — if only he had worked harder, if only he had stayed at practice later, if only he hadn’t stumbled when skating out of his scratch spin — maybe things would’ve worked out differently. Maybe he wouldn’t be wiping away stubborn tears that had left salted stains on his pillowcase.

And so when George woke up the next morning, he’d put on a smile. Brushed his teeth. Combed his hair (it didn’t look pretty — for young George, combing his hair meant running his fingers through the front and praying for the best). Got dressed, and bounded his way down the stairs to eat breakfast and pet his cat before school. His father had asked him how he slept while his mother tutted and tried to fix his hair; George had merely fiddled with the collar of his school uniform and told his dad that he slept well.

A lie, of course — but George had told himself that he’d work through it on his own. He’d train harder, not only for himself, but also to avoid the disappointed eyes of his figure skating coach, and he’d distract himself for the rest of the day by doodling figure skates onto his English homework.

It’s the exact same thing ten years later. Sat in the library, waiting for Sapnap to announce the results of their bet, George arches up an eyebrow.

“What’d he say?” George asks.

Rather than answering, Sapnap reaches down into his bag again and pulls out his wallet. He shuffles through the various bills, cards, and coupons in there for a moment — before pulling out a collection of bills and sliding them across the table. George ticks up an eyebrow and peers across the desk. They total thirty-five dollars.

“I won?”

Sapnap shuts his wallet and shoves it into his jacket pocket. “He said no.”

Quick to snatch the money up, George’s face breaks into a grin. “No way,” he says, ecstatic.

“You should’ve seen his face! He was so confident about it, too. He said it was just a friendly thing, but he had fun and wants to do it again.”

He laughs gleefully. “I fucking told you, dumbass. I was literally there,” he taunts. “Thanks for the money, by the way.”

Sapnap wrinkles his nose, and sarcastically, he responds, “You’re welcome.”

George smiles, shuffles through the bills, and tries to ignore the lump in his throat.

He won. He should be happy — but a small part of him, nagging at the back of his mind, wonders why he still feels slightly disappointed.

With the beginning of the new semester, the winter invitational creeps up quickly.

“What is *wrong* with you,” Sapnap remarks, sharply poking George’s shoulder. “Hello?”

“Leave me alone,” George grumbles. He tucks his face deeper into his arms.

He’s near falling asleep at this point — he’d spent all night last night running through his choreography for the winter invitational. His double axel is perfect now, and every time he sticks the landing and glides out on one delicate, poised foot, there’s an uncontrollable grin that stretches across his face. It’s the power of hard work, he thinks — and even though his feet are sore, it’s worth it.

There’s a gentle nudge in George’s elbow, and an amused voice that follows. “You okay?”

George tilts his head to rest his chin on the desk, and above him, Clay’s eyebrows are raised with a knowing smile. “No,” George answers, petulant. “I’m dying.”

“I can see that,” Clay says, twiddling with the pen held in his fingers. There’s a pause, for a moment, as Clay swivels his head to give some indecipherable look at Sapnap. “Do you wanna just... go home and reschedule, then?”

At that, George jolts awake. “It’s fine,” he slurs, muffling a yawn with his hands, “I’m up. What’re we working on?”

Head dizzy and disoriented, George sits up and drags a lazy hand across his face. Sapnap is sitting beside him; wordlessly, Sapnap pushes his paper cup full of coffee towards him. George clasps his fingers around the warm drink, grateful.

“I’m working on my novel study,” Clay says. “Sapnap?”

Smacking a palm down on his notes, Sapnap replies, “Physics problem set.”

“Don’t even talk to me about that,” George groans. “I’ve barely even opened up my textbooks ever since the semester started.”

“I can’t even blame you. Practice must be kicking your ass,” Sapnap says.

“I think my coaches want to see me suffer,” says George, resisting the urge to let his head fall down onto the desk.

Clay doesn’t say anything, but he quirks his lips up and returns to scribbling down something that George can’t see in his notebook. George runs a hand through his hair in an attempt to smooth away the damage he’s done in his sleep-deprived state. Eyelids heavy, he rubs at his eyes until the world comes back into focus.

The library is quiet, a far cry from what it was only a month ago during exams. George is thankful for that, at the very least. Not many people are around to pay any mind to his complaining.

Pulling his notes out of his bag, George catches sight of Clay sitting across from him. He’s got his pen in his mouth now, chewing on the cap absentmindedly as he sweeps his fingers across his notes. George purses his lips in thought.

Things haven’t changed between them since winter break. George is glad — if Sapnap’s stupid bet had done something to them, he’d never hear the end of it. Thirty-five dollars can’t buy a friendship.

George’s notebook smacks against the wooden desk as he sets it down, and sighing, he flips it open. “Physics,” he says, already exasperated.

“Physics,” Sapnap echoes. “Wanna exchange answers with me for the practice questions?”

“Okay, but mine are probably all wrong.”

“Come on,” Sapnap sighs, making grabby hands towards George’s papers, “they won’t be. Pass ‘em over.”

George slides the notes over with one hand. He sips Sapnap’s coffee with his other. It’s horribly bitter and far too hot at the same time, and it leaves George wincing. Placing the cup back down on the table, he asks, “What about you?”

“Hm?”

“Are there any hockey games coming up?”

“Oh my god,” Sapnap says, turning to George with wide eyes, “so fucking many. We’ve got the championship playoffs in February, and that’s like twenty more hockey games away. If we even get that far in the bracket.” He pauses, then quickly tacks on, “Which, of course we will, but still.”

“Right,” George says, “obviously.”

Sapnap raises his eyebrows, and the shuffling of papers ceases. “I hope you know, I won’t hesitate to fight you right here in this library.”

Too tired to argue, George rolls his eyes and slumps back into his chair.

The winter invitational goes off without a hitch — George travels two hours out of the city to perform at some other university and secures the third place spot for the Men’s Freeskate discipline, boosting Northern University up to second overall in the competition. His teammates are ecstatic, and his coaches look prouder than they’ve ever been. He’s finally starting to prove to them that he deserved that figure skating scholarship.

“Nice,” Sapnap exclaims approvingly.

George and Sapnap are in their dorm — George has just arrived back after a long bus ride, and if his legs don’t already ache from skating, they ache from sitting in the cramped bus seats. He’s hanging up his medal on the wall above his bed, another added to his collection. George catches his tongue between his teeth in concentration as he steps back to look at his work.

“You think?”

“Duh,” Sapnap says, perched on his bed, “obviously. You deserve it, dude. No one stays as late at the rink as you do.”

George turns to face him, face scrunched up. “You’re being all... sappy,” he announces, slowly. “It’s weird.”

“Shut up,” Sapnap teases. He chuckles a pillow across the room — George just barely dodges it. “Are you gonna shower now?”

“No,” George sighs, casting a glance at the still fully packed duffle bag by the foot of his bed. “There’s a team meeting at the rink tonight.”

And so twenty minutes later, George finds himself sat in the stands, listening to his coaches drone on about their performance at the invitational and their plans for next month’s championship. It’s another set of choreography to learn, another set of jumps and spins to perfect, another overnight trip. The thought of it makes George dizzy. As much as he loves skating, it’s tiring.

The rest of his team eventually shuffle out of the stands after their coach dismisses them. Holding back a yawn, George moves to grab his bag to leave — until he spots a familiar helmeted figure across the rink.

He casts a glance over his shoulder, making sure everyone has left, before he walks up to the plexiglass. Dream is shuffling with something in his hands, and George tugs his bag a little tighter over his shoulders.

“Dream!”

His head darts up, and he gives George a small wave. George circles the perimeter of the rink, grinning, and stops in front of Dream with his face flushed from the cold.

“Hey,” Dream says, muffled again with the way his mouthguard’s sitting heavy in his mouth, beneath the helmet. The smile is audible in his voice when he says, “Got something for you.”

George frowns, a little surprised. “You did?”

“Heard you got third at the invitational,” Dream says. He holds out a gloved hand. “This is like, a congratulations and a thank you gift all rolled up into one.”

Gingerly, George takes the gift out of his hands. It’s soft underneath his fingertips as he unfolds it — it’s a hockey jersey, all green and white on the sleeves, identical to the one that Dream’s wearing. A smile works its way across George’s face before he can stop himself.

“I don’t know if you’ll like it,” Dream starts, and he sounds nervous now, “and I don’t know if it’ll fit, but I thought you could wear it to the next game you watch. If you want.”

George grins as he holds it out. “Ew. Does it have your sweat on it?”

Dream laughs, boisterous. “No, what the hell? It’s brand new for you, by the way. You should be grateful.”

He is, actually. He really is. But George has never been good at receiving gifts, never known how he’s meant to react, and it makes his stomach twist into knots. Dream’s sort of got that effect on him. He doesn’t know how to feel about it.

“You didn’t have to,” George says, nearly breathless.

Underneath all that hockey padding, Dream shrugs. “I wanted to give you something.”

George’s skin warms. He tries to brush it away, rocking back on his heels to ease out some of the nervous energy that’s settled in his bones. “When’s your next game?”

“Here. Next week, Friday night,” Dream says. “It’s the first game that actually starts to really *matter* for the championships.”

“I’ll be there,” George says definitively. If he looks hard enough beneath Dream’s helmet, he thinks he almost sees a smile.

He folds the jersey up carefully and tucks it into his bag, right next to his skates, the laces loose and tangled around each other at the ends. Dream must be able to read his mind or something, because he asks before George can even say anything.

“Are you skating today?”

George frowns, shakes his head. “I wish. I have to study. And I’m tired.”

Dream tilts his head at him like he’s exasperated. “C’mon. Not even for, like, half an hour?”

“That’s half an hour of my precious studying time.”

“We can shoot pucks,” Dream offers, “or you can teach me one of your jumps, or whatever.”

George nearly laughs. “You don’t even have your hockey stick.”

Dream takes a half step back towards the locker rooms. “I’m five seconds away from going and getting it right now.”

“You’re insufferable,” George tells him, but he’s grinning and his bag is slipping down from his shoulder to the crook of his elbow. “Fifteen minutes.”

“You love me,” Dream teases, and it makes George scrunch up his nose.

Dream rushes back towards the door on the other end of the rink. George is sighing as he sinks down into the stands behind him, pulling his skates out of his bag and slipping them onto his sore feet.

Assignments and lectures and everything that makes him want to tear his hair out can wait, George thinks. For now, he has skating, and he has Dream’s stupid, stupid laugh that makes him feel warm all over.

hi surprise Lolz

i realized some of the timeline for this fic doesnt make any fucking sense bc i fucked it up and forgot about things while writing. Very annoyed at past me for that but i went back and fixed them if ur confused on why there seems to be a shift between the last chapter and this one

if ur wondering why i put this on hiatus: 1. Physical + mental health reasons and 2. it took me a while to build up the courage to revisit this again. But aside from that i missed writing these boys so much and i hope you missed reading them as well :) i hope the change in writing style isn't too drastic because it's been a long while and i dont really write like this anymore but i did my best to match it to the other chapters. Updates will be regular until the end because i've got most of the chapters written out already

love you

[twitter](#)

[tumblr](#)

misconceptions and museum friend-dates

Chapter Summary

A deep, shuddering breath overtakes Clay's entire body. His shoulders shake, and his voice comes out weak. "I'm scared," he confesses, quietly. "I'm really, really fucking scared."

"Clay?" George steps towards him. "Are you okay?"

"I messed up so bad," he chokes out. "I did something really, really stupid last year, and now I can't get out of it without— without ruining everything."

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dream's so nervous that he thinks his heart is about to beat out of his chest.

He's not normally this anxious before a game, but since this one's the first game of the playoffs, today's an exception. His leg's bouncing up and down as he listens to his coach rattle on and on about the play that they planned out last week at practice. He's still a little skeptical that they'll be able to pull it off, but the kind of faith he's got in his team is unyielding.

Thinking about how quick he'll have to skate across the ice makes his head hurt. He can't even hear the clatter of sticks and equipment around him, can only focus on the sound of air holding steady in his lungs, and before he knows it his team's standing up and making their way towards the rink. Numbly, he feels some of them clap him on the shoulder.

"You good?" Sapnap asks him, gnawing on his mouthguard, and all Dream can do is nod.

The stakes feel impossibly higher this time around. Last year was different. Last year was his first year as captain, and no one was expecting him to lead the Lions towards a victory. This time, though — it feels like all eyes are on him as he follows his team, steps out onto the rink, and surrounds himself with the sound of the roaring stands. It nearly seems like the entire student body is there.

He goes through the motions, fist bumping his team at the gate and holding his hockey stick so tightly in his hand that he thinks it's close to snapping, but the entire time he's searching for a familiar face in the stands. George said he'd be here, but Dream can't see him past the crowd. It only makes the pit of anxiety settled in Dream's lungs swell even larger. Maybe it was selfish of Dream to hope that seeing George would make all that anxiety dissipate.

But Dream swallows all that and steps out onto the ice, sharp silver blades scraping beneath him. He can't think about things like that when he has a game to win.

It seems like everyone's already been waiting for him, because they're taking their starting positions not long after he skates a few laps around the perimeter of the rink. They're playing against the University of Westshore Stallions today, some school from a couple hours west of Northern, and their royal blue jerseys are bright beneath the rink lights.

The forward across from Dream at the centre line — Eight, Dream decides to call him, because his jersey reads *08* in sharp characters — nods at him beneath his black helmet. Dream nods back, breath shaky, and rests the blade of his stick down on the ice. His hockey pads are digging into his skin, and it's all so uncomfortably hot.

The referee drops the puck between their sticks. Dream nearly misses it, nearly lets Eight snatch it away and pass it off to the side, but the puck clatters as Dream manages to steal it back. It's all too easy to pass it to Sapnap at his side, who drives it towards the opposite end of the rink just as planned.

Dream's legs are fucking burning as he skates after him to keep up with the puck. Eight tries to guard him, blocking his vision, but it doesn't even matter because Sapnap's reached a dead end. He's gone past the net — all eyes are on him as number Seventy-Two of the Stallions tries to back him into a corner — but at the last moment, he's swiveling around on his skates. Shards of ice fly up around him.

Sapnap's still in control of the puck, thank god for stick-handling drills, and Dream takes the opportunity to dart out and away from Eight. There's an opening, now, a clean fraction of a second where Sapnap can take the shot — but Seventy-Two comes back straight out of nowhere, and Sapnap's forced to launch the puck right between his feet.

It skids across the ice, frictionless, and catches right at the edge of Dream's stick. There's no time to think about the sudden change in plan, not when Eight's already circling behind Dream like a shark. He skates right — the goalie moves from his spot in front of the net to block him — but Dream launches the puck up in the air anyways, his aim strong and straight and true.

The puck shoots past the goalie's shoulder and lands in the top corner of the net. Before Dream knows it, his teammates are crashing into him, pushing him against the plexiglass and surrounding him with their ecstatic cheers.

Dream grins from under his helmet, the puck is taken out of the net for another face-off, and the game goes on.

The Stallions can't really keep up with any of the Lions, menaces across the ice, and it's made even worse when one of their forwards gets penalized for elbowing. Scoring two extra goals is easy in the third period with one less opposing player, and by the end of it all, the Lions are 3:1.

They win, because of course they do, and the whole rink feels like it's vibrating with the combined energy of everyone in the stands and the feeling of all of Dream's teammates piling on top of each other. It's sweaty and sticky and smells like old snow, but they're all so, so unbelievably happy that Dream doesn't really mind it at all. His whole face feels like it's burning from overexertion and joy at the same time — they're moving on to the next level of the playoff bracket, one step closer to the glory of the Royal Cup finals.

"You fucking killed it, dude," Punz tells him as they're walking towards the locker room, smacking the back of his helmet, and Dream laughs at the sudden jolt.

"Thanks. You too," he says.

The rest of the Lions disappear into the room, tugging off their helmets and complaining about needing a shower, but Dream lingers outside. His feet are aching from his hockey skates. He tosses his stick back and forth between his hands, trying to ease the adrenaline that's still working its way through his system.

Laughter and music and screams erupt from behind the locker room door. Dream wishes so badly, sometimes, that he could go in and take off his stupidly stuffy helmet and join in on all that. He spends far more time practicing than any of them, but most days it feels like he barely knows his teammates beyond the ice. He figures that's the same way they feel about him, too.

The sound of footsteps tug him out of his thoughts. When he looks up from his stick, George is standing there, grinning in a too-big hockey jersey and soft-looking sweatpants and a pair of scuffed up sneakers. Dream's heart stutters.

"You came?" he asks, a little awestruck.

George gives him a funny look and nudges him with his elbow. "Yeah? For, like, school spirit."

"We won," Dream says.

"I know. I saw," George tells him.

The door on the other end of the hall opens and effectively cuts off whatever's on the tip of Dream's tongue. Number eight from the Stallions trudges in, clearly exhausted, and he's got his helmet propped up against his hip.

"Hey," he says, once he's caught sight of Dream. "Good game, man."

"You too," Dream offers.

He shifts under Eight's inquisitive gaze, darting back and forth between Dream's helmet and George, standing next to him. It's echoey in the hall, silent save for the sounds of the Lions' celebration.

Eight gestures vaguely between the two of them. "You guys are..." he trails off, and George furrows his brows.

Dream frowns at first, confused, but once it clicks he's rushing to correct him. Eight assumed that they're *dating*. "Oh, no," Dream cuts in. "No."

"No," George adds, definitively.

"Yeah. No. We're friends," Dream agrees, perhaps a little too quickly, and then he reaches down to link his and George's arms together. "See?"

"Oh," Eight says. He looks confused, face all creased. "Sorry. I shouldn't have assumed."

"It's okay," George tells him, even though it's very much not okay, because the tone in his voice when he'd said 'no' earlier made something crack against the cage of Dream's chest.

Things are okay, Dream thinks. A sudden choking feeling crawls up his throat. He's not really sure why.

When Eight leaves, Dream takes a breath and asks George what he thought of the game, hoping that the sudden stiffness in his shoulders isn't noticeable beneath all that hockey padding.

Clay asks George to hang out the next day.

It's an impromptu sort of thing — George rolls out of bed on Saturday morning fully expecting to spend the day procrastinating his assignments, but when he checks his phone, there's a message

from Clay asking him to meet somewhere. George has to look up the address before he knows what he's getting into, but it doesn't take much thought before he's texting back with a yes.

He hopes that things will be easier this time. Now that he knows that he and Clay are just friends, he won't have any more of those fleeting, hopeful moments in his chest, like when Sapnap had implied that the winter festival had meant something more.

The January air is frigid when George steps out and starts to walk, so he's forced to tug his jacket over his shoulders even tighter. It smells like barbecue from the hot dog vendor sitting at the end of the street, and road salt scattered along the sidewalk crunches underneath George's boots.

He doesn't know why he feels a little bit nervous. So what if he thinks that Clay is smart, and cute, and funny, and maybe the kindest person that he's ever met? So what if he misses spending hours in the library together, shoulder-to-shoulder, trying to refine George's essays?

George forces all of that uncertainty far, deep down before he has too long to think about it.

He arrives in front of the building a few minutes later with the wind whipping harshly against his face. It's a museum — one of the bigger ones in the city that towers over him. When he steps inside, warm air envelops him all over, and Clay's approaching him with a smile.

"Hey," Clay says, hands tucked in his coat pockets. "Ready?"

George makes a face at him. "For what?"

"To see everything," Clay says. "You haven't been here before, right?"

George shakes his head. He's seen bits and pieces of the museum online, but being inside is something different entirely.

They wait in line to buy their tickets, and then they're setting off to explore the exhibits. It's quiet today, even for a weekend, and it's a little bit terrifying to feel so small and insignificant beneath the museum's tall ceilings. Something swoops low in George's gut when he turns to see Clay staring straight ahead as they walk towards the ancient Greek sculpture gallery.

"I'm excited," he says, nearly bouncing on his heels. "I haven't been here in ages."

George grins. "Do you like history?"

"Sort of," Clay says. "I had this — *huge* obsession with ancient Greece when I was a kid, and I guess it never really stopped. You?"

"I was more interested in nature when I was a kid, I think," George tells him. "Like, catching frogs and birds and bugs and stuff."

Clay laughs, bright and clear, and he nudges George in the side with his elbow. "Ew. Yeah, not my thing."

"You're from Florida," George shoots back, but it's with no real malice. "You've probably seen all sorts of gross shit."

"Doesn't mean I have to *like* it," Clay says, grinning back.

The ancient Greece exhibit is gorgeous with displays of smoothed, marble sculptures and red-fired vases. Clay practically drags George around the entire time, rambling on and on about every piece

of history there, until he nearly talks himself hoarse. George listens to it all even though he has barely any interest in ancient history. He thinks, vaguely, that he could listen to Clay talk for hours.

The museum is massive, so by the time that they're done with Greece, there are still a million more exhibits to explore. "We should go to the planet Earth exhibit next," Clay says, pointing up at a map on the wall. "Since you said you liked nature."

George wants to melt into the floor.

As they're walking up the stairs to the next floor, their elbows knock together, and it somehow gives George the confidence he needs to say what he's been thinking all day. "I'm kind of surprised."

"With what?"

"With you," George continues. His heart's caught in his throat, but he barrels on. "I don't know. I kind of thought that when the semester ended, and I finished with literary nonfiction, we wouldn't hang out anymore."

Out of the corner of his eye, he sees Clay's mouth tip down into a frown. "George," he starts, "we're friends. Obviously we're going to hang out."

"Yeah, I know," George admits. He turns to see Clay, nearly swallowed whole by his big, puffy winter jacket, and smiles. "I got a really good grade in that class, though. Thanks to you."

"You worked hard," Clay tells him. "You're probably, like, top of your program or something."

George shakes his head, laughing. "No, definitely not. Some of the people in my classes are studying for, like, twelve hours a day. Which is insane."

"Yeah, but they aren't skating every night and living a whole country away from home," Clay says.

It nearly steals the breath out of George's lungs. He's not used to being talked to so earnestly, not used to feeling so seen. Somehow, Clay understands him enough to know exactly how he ticks.

Clay looks at him for a moment before he turns away and points ahead at the exhibit. "We're here."

The Earth exhibit is gorgeous, to the point where when they're done walking through it, George is a little bit sad to leave. Clay follows him as he jumps from display to display, and he's got this dumb, stupid little smile on his face the entire time, even when George points towards a taxidermied fish and says that it looks like him.

"Hey," Clay says, just as George is walking back towards the stairs. "We missed that thing."

He points towards a small, shadowy dome sitting in the far corner of the room. It only takes a fraction of a second before Clay's grabbing George by the arm and dragging him there.

When they step past the curtained entrance, all the air is knocked out of George's lungs. It's a miniature planetarium, and the two of them stop, in awe, as they stare up at the stars and galaxies and planets projected on the ceiling.

George doesn't even realize how long he's been looking up, watching as the stars shift in the inky

black sky, until he averts his gaze back down and sees Clay already staring right at him. His face is dimly lit in swirling blues, and the freckles on his face seem to be nearly glowing.

He takes a deep breath. “I’m really glad we hung out today,” he says.

“Really?”

“Yeah,” Clay replies, tipping his head up so he’s facing the artificial sky. False moonlight haloes his hair in white. “I’m having fun.”

George feels a little bit breathless. “Me too,” he says.

A pause passes between them, and George can tell that there’s something impatiently tugging at Clay’s vocal chords, begging to be let out. George tracks the uneven motions of his lungs before their eyes suddenly meet, pine green against unyielding brown.

Clay’s mouth stutters for a moment before he asks, “Can I tell you something?”

George frowns. “What is it?”

A deep, shuddering breath overtakes Clay’s entire body. His shoulders shake, and his voice comes out weak. “I’m scared,” he confesses, quietly. “I’m really, really fucking scared.”

“Clay?” George steps towards him. “Are you okay?”

“I messed up so bad,” he chokes out. “I did something really, really stupid last year, and now I can’t get out of it without—without ruining everything.”

George moves closer, trying to close the distance between them, but Clay just steps backwards and wraps his arms around himself. “Whatever you did can’t be that bad,” George reassures.

“It is,” Clay insists. He shakes his head, gasping, and squeezes his eyes shut. “You’re going—you’re going to hate me.”

Against his better judgement, George steps closer and plants two shaking palms on either side of Clay’s face. His skin is cold to the touch. “I wouldn’t,” George breathes out. “Promise.”

“I’m so, so fucking tired,” Clay rasps, just as tears start to roll down his face. George swipes his thumbs under his eyes. “I just want it all to end.”

Concern hits George’s mind first. “What?” he asks. “What do you want to end?”

“I don’t—” Clay whispers, finally opening his tear-stained eyes to meet George’s gaze. But he doesn’t answer.

Instead, Clay tugs him in for a crushing, all-encompassing hug.

His arms are strong and warm and feel like pure, unfiltered desperation. George doesn’t know where to put his arms at first, but he wraps them around Clay’s waist, buries his face in Clay’s shoulder, and prays that it’s enough.

A shaky exhale escapes George’s lips. He doesn’t need to know what Clay did, at least not yet. For now, there’s the two of them, wrapped up in each other’s limbs beneath the glimmering stars of the planetarium and the entire universe ahead. He hugs Clay tighter.

If George listens closely enough, presses his ear against the curve of Clay’s lips, he thinks that he

nearly hears a whispered *I don't deserve you.*

Chapter End Notes

i was thinking . i dont have a playlist for this fic but if i did Christmas Tree Farm would be on it like fifty times . thats the song that plays when theyre at the winter festival. I was thinking about making a playlist but i dont even know what i would put on it other than christmas tree farm So just listen to that one

[twitter](#)

[tumblr](#)

aftermaths and competitive spirits

Chapter Summary

Dream groans. “My whole body hurts.”

“Slamming people against the rink boards will do that to you,” George says, teasing. He lifts up a foot, as if Dream will be able to understand him better that way, and balances on one skate. “My feet hurt more.”

For a moment, there’s no answer. Dream’s body language is unreadable, until his voice curls up into something confident, challenging. “Wanna bet?”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Please don’t tell anyone,” Clay says quietly. “About— you know. I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have... shouldn’t have said all that.”

They’re standing in front of Clay’s dormitory building, cheeks bitten red from the cold. It’s dark outside now, and the streetlamps flicker across Clay’s face, casting him in gold. George shrinks down into his coat. They walked from the museum back onto campus together, and the entire time, Clay didn’t say anything.

He did, however, reach down to intertwine their frostbitten fingers. George was nearly shocked out of his own senses.

“Don’t be sorry,” George tells him. He takes a breath and watches as it comes out as a puff of fog. “I won’t tell anyone.”

Clay shakes his head and stares down at the floor. “I’ll tell you what I did eventually,” he says. “I promise, I will. Even if you’ll get mad at me for it—”

“I won’t,” George cuts in.

“You don’t know that,” Clay tells him. He swallows before he’s looking back towards his building. “It’s cold. We should probably...”

George narrows his eyes as he raises his head to really, truly study Clay’s face: watery eyes, blond hair grown too long, freckles shaped like stars. He’s always seen Clay as the smartest, most collected person in the room. Now, he thinks that he’s never seen Clay look so weak.

“Yeah,” George says. “I’ll see you soon?”

Clay nods at him, tight-lipped, and then he’s disappearing into the building. George walks back to Amana Hall by himself and wonders what kinds of secrets Clay is hiding.

On nights where George feels completely and utterly lost, he likes spending time skating on the ice with Dream.

A night goes by without Dream showing up, and it's normal. Two nights go by, and it's fine. After the third night, George confronts Sapnap first thing in the morning for answers.

Sapnap groans and buries his head into his pillow. "Let me go back to *sleep*."

"No," George says, tearing their curtains open. Early morning light hits Sapnap right in the face. "What's going on?"

"*God*," Sapnap says, dragging a hand across his face. "You're an idiot, you know that, right? Where do you think *I've* been the past three nights?"

Realization hits George all at once. "Oh."

"Yeah, *oh*," Sapnap echoes, pulling the covers over his head.

George is a huge fucking idiot. Sapnap's been travelling the past few nights playing at away games all over the province, which means that Dream must be doing the same thing. Practices and games have been ramping up lately for them as hockey season comes to an apex, and it makes George feel vaguely guilty. How long has Dream been staying at the rink just to talk to him when he could be practicing or studying or sleeping?

George blinks down at Sapnap's blanketed form. He pokes him once in what he hopes is his shoulder. "Did you win?"

"Won all three," Sapnap tells him, voice muffled. "Moving up in the world."

He gets out of bed eventually. George takes that as an invitation to force him out the door as soon as he's done getting dressed, and then the two of them grab a quick breakfast together before Sapnap's going to his first lecture of the day. George is left on his own, with a whole hour before his class starts, and so he slips into the library so the warm air inside can envelop him all over. It's freezing outside. He's not staying out there a second longer than he has to.

When he collapses into one of the library's sturdy wooden chairs, phantom images spike behind his eyes. If he squints hard enough, allows his exhaustion-addled brain to take over for a brief moment, he thinks that he nearly sees Clay's figure sat across from him. He lets himself indulge in it for a moment: the foolish idea of Clay grinning at him with his chin set in his hands, the distant memory of their breaths mingling from the time they fell asleep together on the desk.

It all seems so far away now, especially after the museum. George has been trying his hardest not to think about it too hard, but the curiosity tugs at his heartstrings. Maybe he'd be able to forget about it easier if Clay hadn't reached down to grasp his hand on the way home.

It felt overwhelming, like Clay's hand had drawn all the cold out of George's body, like his stupid puffer jacket had swallowed the two of them whole. A small part of George wishes that it had — but he forces all of that away before it gets too close, too real.

He takes a shuddering breath as he slumps back into his chair and stares out the window. Outside, thick flakes of snow swirl down from the sky, and something heavy materializes in his mouth as he remembers the faint taste of hot chocolate on his tongue.

He ends up at the ice rink later that night. It feels like just yesterday that he came home for the winter invitational with aching, fatigued limbs, but now there's the upcoming figure skating championships to worry about.

George is absolutely fucking nauseous at the idea of it.

He's been choreographing his routines with his coaches for the past few days, but there's a few parts of it that he still can't seem to get quite right. His double axel is flawless, and they've been pushing him harder and harder to go for that triple axel during his freeskate. It'd blow the judges away. He's finally able to land it now, but it's not as refined as he'd like it to be, no matter how hard he tries.

It's exhausting at worst and annoying at best. For now, he'll keep trying to perfect it for championship day, and he runs through each step and turn of his routine with his music in his earbuds until it's embedded deep into his subconscious.

The rink's empty, the same way that it's been the past few nights. George can't imagine how tiring it must be for the hockey team to travel from school to school every few nights just to play.

When the gate creaks open, that familiar, screeching sound, it sparks something bright in the center of his chest. He's grinning as he turns around, already knowing who it is.

"You're back," George says. He tugs out his earbuds. A little ways across the rink, Dream shuts the gate behind him, and his shoulders rise the way they always do when George knows he's smiling. "I thought you got tired of me or something."

Dream skates over, nudges him in the shoulder. "I would never."

George... George has missed this. He doesn't quite understand how, but Dream somehow *gets* him. They both know exactly how it feels to pour their entire souls into something, to dedicate themselves to their sport wholly, and that knowledge makes something in George's chest warm.

"How's hockey been?" he asks. He nudges Dream back in the elbow and grins when they both go sliding a little bit across the ice. "Sapnap's been telling me about your games."

"I'm exhausted, that's how it's been," Dream groans. "My whole body hurts."

"Slamming people against the rink boards will do that to you," George says, teasing. He lifts up a foot, as if Dream will be able to understand him better that way, and balances on one skate. "My feet hurt more."

For a moment, there's no answer. Dream's body language is unreadable, until his voice curls up into something confident, challenging. "Wanna bet?"

George raises his eyebrows. "Bet?"

"You taught me how to jump, I taught you how to shoot a puck," Dream starts, tossing his hockey stick between his hands, "so we have a competition. To see who's got it harder."

George thinks back to the two of them passing a puck to each other over the ice, to Dream failing miserably at attempting a jump, and thinks that there's no way in hell that he's going to back away now. He tilts his chin up as he sticks out a hand to shake on it. "I hope you know that you're going to lose," he says.

Dream tugs off his clunky gloves to press their palms together. George barely gets a chance to look at it before Dream shoves it back inside, but the feeling of it is vaguely familiar. "We'll see," Dream replies.

They clamber over each other rushing to grab a second hockey stick and puck for George from the

storage room, and once they're back on the ice, there's adrenaline and competitive spirit flowing through their veins. They're both laughing as they race each other across the rink despite the ache in their legs from overexertion.

It's nice. It's really, really nice. Dream is faster than him at getting across the ice, and as George is trying to catch his breath while Dream celebrates his victory, it's far too easy to let all his worries — about the upcoming championships, about his GPA, about Clay and his tears at the museum — melt away.

Dream's better at handling the puck, because of course he is. It's almost mesmerizing to watch him zigzag back and forth atop the ice, never once losing control of it. But as good as he is at hockey, he's absolute shit at attempting any of George's figure skating moves, and the both of them laugh when Dream lands flat on his back after tripping over his own feet.

"Ow," Dream says. He groans as he thumps his helmet back down onto the ice, and it only makes George laugh harder.

George skates over to help him up, trying not to stare too long at the lines in Dream's neck. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, fuck." Dream's voice is strained. "I'm exhausted. I just want to lie down here."

"You can't lie here forever," George tells him, but he's sinking down to the ground so the two of them can lay side-by-side. The ice seeps through his clothes and makes his skin go numb. "It's cold."

For a moment, the two of them go silent, staring up at the bright floodlights above them. From here, the rink's ceiling looks endlessly far away.

George doesn't dare to turn over, to look at Dream's unmoving figure from beside him. It feels like the fear of the unknown is embedded perpetually into the ice. He wonders what it would be like to stare past the endless darkness of Dream's helmet, to track the slope of his nose, to hear what he sounds like when his voice isn't muffled.

But the idea of it is terrifying, so George clears his throat and trains his eyes on the lights above until his vision starts to go blurry. "So... who won?"

He feels Dream kick him, lightly, in the foot. "I did. Obviously."

"You fell on your ass just now," George protests.

"Yeah, and *you* couldn't catch up to me with the puck," Dream counters.

George grins. "You still haven't gotten up."

Dream huffs playfully. "Fine, then. It's a tie," he says, and George hears the material of his jersey shift when Dream turns his head over to look at him.

George meets his gaze. There's a long, drawn out moment where George tries to map out the image of Dream's face through his helmet, and desperately, he wants to know what Dream is thinking as he stares right back at him. George feels breathless. "Ties are stupid," he says.

They lay there for a moment longer before Dream is groaning as he picks himself off the slippery ice. "I have, like, so many games next week. I need to practice."

George doesn't move, just lets the feeling of the biting ice sting against his skin, and tries to calm the sudden palpitations in his heartbeat. His face feels warm, it always has when he spends time around Dream, and suddenly he understands exactly why.

He squeezes his eyes shut until there are dots dancing in his vision. He's so, so fucked.

Chapter End Notes

this chapter is short bc it is the calm before the storm. and i added the Alternate Universe - Canada tag because I thought it was funny . Please help me popularize this tag in the Dnf Fanfiction Community

also can we talk about how i just refuse to name the city they r in even though it is so so obvious . Like it is funny to me at this point so i will keep doing it . Real ones know...

double also: THANK U TO MY BEST FRIEND [sai niunep](#) for 1. being my canadian bestie and 2. supporting me while writing this fic . Like he is truly the only one who understands me . We have the same mind. go check them out PLEASE!

[twitter](#)
[tumblr](#)

street food and late nights

Chapter Summary

George grins as he nudges Clay back. “I’m glad the school stuck me with that stupid English course.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah,” George says. “Otherwise we never would’ve become friends.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Having a crush on one guy who might not like boys is already a problem. Having a crush on two guys amplifies things tenfold.

George vaguely remembers liking boys when he was little, when he’d go over to his friend’s house and they’d get a little too close while doing math homework together. But things didn’t start to get real until secondary school, after he got his first real boyfriend.

It was a silly little thing — holding hands on the way home from school, turning around in class to look at each other while the teacher was busy — but it *mattered*. It meant something, at least to George, and maybe that was why it hurt so much when he got broken up with.

He lets his mind wander like that sometimes, wondering if Clay’s ever had a boyfriend or if a boy has ever broken Dream’s heart. It would be infinitely easier, George thinks, if he just liked one of them over the other.

But he doesn’t, and maybe that’s the worst part.

Weeks later, George’s hands are shaking as his thumbs hover over his phone. Across the room, Sapnap flings one of his hockey gloves at him. “Just fucking *do it* already,” he groans.

Sapnap’s in the middle of haphazardly packing his duffel bag for tonight’s game. It’s the last one before the championship semifinals — the Lions have been fighting their way through the bracket, and if they win this one, they’ll be sent off to compete at the championships.

The hockey championships are at the same time as the figure skating ones this year, and they’re both taking place at the same massive arena a few hours away from the city. In just a few days, George will be piling into a bus with all his teammates and setting off with or without the hockey team there.

George can tell that Sapnap’s nervous for tonight by the way his leg keeps bouncing up and down. But he knows that there’s steel running through Sapnap’s veins, and even if the Lions lose tonight’s game, they still have today.

So he blindly throws the glove back in Sapnap’s direction and hopes that it hits its mark. “I don’t want to.”

Sapnap plops down next to him on his bed and peers at his phone. “Because you like him,” Sapnap says. “Just, like, ask him to hang out tonight.”

“I do not,” George grumbles, even though he very much does. He throws his phone down onto his pillow. “And he already said that we were only hanging out as friends.”

“George,” Sapnap says suddenly. The sincerity in his tone catches George off guard. “I think he likes you.”

“Stop.”

“He does!” Sapnap insists. He nudges George in the shoulder. “He’s so obvious about it too. Otherwise I wouldn’t be telling you to send that stupid text.”

George has to take a second to think about it. The last time he and Clay hung out was at the museum, and his words from the planetarium are still playing on loop in his head. *You’re going to hate me*, Clay had said. *I did something really, really stupid.*

The mystery of it all is terrifying. Desperately, George wants to know what’s going on, what Clay did that was so bad that it made him burst into tears. And Sapnap’s good at planting hope into the centre of his chest, letting it bloom, allowing it to fester.

George feels like he’s blindly plunging himself into icy water when he presses the send button on his message.

Do you wanna hang out tonight? it reads, in tiny, unassuming letters. Sapnap shakes him in the shoulder excitedly, and George scowls and pushes him away with no real malice.

The reply comes nearly instantaneously. *I don’t know*, Clay types back, and for a moment, it makes George’s heart stop. But he keeps reading: *I kinda have a thing tonight, so I might be a little late, if that’s okay.*

Sapnap frowns. “A thing?”

George’s hands dart across his keyboard. *Yeah, that’s fine :]*

Awesome :)

They text for a little while longer, planning out the time and place where they should meet up, and by the end of it all Sapnap’s looking at George with a blinding grin across his face.

“Told you,” he says.

“You’re an idiot,” George tells him, and he reaches over to smack Sapnap with his pillow.

Dream is so fucking screwed.

The school they’re playing against tonight, the Grizzlies, is proving to be a bigger threat than they initially thought. The score’s been tied three-to-three for the entirety of the third period, and Dream can tell that his team is growing antsy — their play-style is getting more and more aggressive, half of them have been sent to the penalty box at least once tonight, and Sapnap’s doing that thing again where he chews on his mouthguard until it’s shredded to pieces.

When the timer ticks down to zero, the entire rink lets out a groan of annoyance. They’re going to go into overtime.

“Fuck this,” Dream grumbles, from under his helmet. His shoulders ache with the number of times the Grizzlies have shoved him against the plexiglass to steal the puck today. The Lions need this win, need to score one more goal to get to the semifinals, and this team is the only thing that’s standing in their way.

The clock above the rink reminds Dream in glowing numbers that every minute he stays here, surrounded by the cold and everyone cheering in the stands, he’s one minute later to hanging out with George. But he can’t really tell George where he is, can he?

Dream takes a deep breath as he drives his skates deeper into the ice, grounding him. All they need is one more goal.

Nights like these, George curses himself for ever moving here in the first place.

He’s sitting on a bench on the street and watching as bustling crowds and cars pass him by. It’s so, so fucking cold outside. Every breath he takes comes back out as a puff of fog, and his toes are starting to go numb. Clay told him he might be late, but it’s been thirty minutes, and there’s still no sign of him.

Okay, George thinks. Maybe he should just go home and shove his feet into the thickest pair of socks that he owns to try to warm up. Sapnap texted him about an hour ago saying that the Lions won their game, that they’re moving onto the semifinals. He should be getting back to campus soon, so maybe they can do something stupid like watch TV together before they pass out from exhaustion.

Before George can think about it any further, there’s the sound of footsteps running towards him, and a thousand apologies spilling out of Clay’s mouth.

“George,” he says, panting, “oh my God. I’m so, so fucking sorry.”

He looks like he sprinted here, and maybe that’s because he did — he’s sweating despite the biting cold, and his blond hair is sticking up from his head and going every-which-way. George nearly laughs at the sight of him.

“It’s fine,” George says, pushing him down onto the bench by the shoulder so they’re sat side-by-side. No one on the street pays them any attention. “Are you alright?”

“Exhausted,” Clay says, raking a shaking hand down his flushed face. He takes a moment to catch his breath, taking deep, heavy breaths of icy February air. “Sorry I’m late. My thing ran longer than expected.”

“It’s okay,” George tells him. Suddenly overcome by awkwardness, his hand drops from Clay’s shoulder. “I mean, you told me that you might be late, so.”

Clay sighs as he thumps his back against the bench. “Yeah, but I feel bad.” He turns to look at George, his face gorgeous and golden in the yellowed street lamps. “The place we were supposed to go is probably closed, right?”

George grimaces. “Yeah.”

It’s then that Clay shoots up from his seat and holds out a palm for George to take. He’s grinning like he knows something that George doesn’t. “C’mon,” he says. “Let’s go. I’ll make it up to you.”

The city is beautiful this time of night, all the buildings twinkling with lights from their windows.

Thick snowflakes fall from the sky and settle on the top of George's head, and his skin warms when Clay reaches over to dust them off his hair.

As they're walking down the street, George shoves his numb fingers into his pockets. He doesn't want to mention what happened at the museum, but he's the first to break the silence. "So," he says, "where are we going?"

"Best shawarma place in the city," Clay tells him. "I've been there, like, a million times. So you have to try it."

The best shawarma place in the city turns out to be this little food truck parked in the intersection between a park and a bubble tea shop that's closed for the night. Clay seems to know the guy who's running the truck, and before long, George has a steaming wrap in his hands that smells fragrant of spices and chicken. Clay gets his own, and then they're setting off for the park across the street.

Clay's already tearing the foil away from his before George can say anything. "Try it," he encourages.

George does the same; the foil crinkles under his hands, and the heat from the toasted pita warms his freezing hands. When he takes a bite, his eyes go wide. "Holy shit."

"It's good, right?" Clay grins at him.

"Really fucking good," George says.

When they reach the park, the benches are covered in a thick layer of snow, so they take their seats on the swings in the middle of the playground. The metal creaks when they both sit down. The swing set's clearly not made for their weight, but George kicks off of the frozen ground anyway so he's swaying back and forth.

It's quiet for a moment while they eat, before Clay breaks the silence. "Sorry again," he blurts out. "I don't want you to think that I stood you up or something."

"You don't have to keep apologizing," George tells him, but in all truth, Clay's reassurance is exactly the kind of thing he needs right now. It's all too easy sometimes to let his insecurities seep through into his thoughts, but something about being friends with him makes that all go away.

Clay frowns. "I do, though. I dunno. You're probably super busy with the championships coming up anyways."

George is. He's been working himself raw every night at the rink for a month now, and sometimes, when the pressure really gets to him, he thinks about how every minute could be another one spent practicing. "Yeah," he says. "I mean, I love skating, but I'm just so tired all the time, you know?"

"I get it," Clay says quietly. George moves to look at him, but Clay's got his eyes trained down onto the frozen sand pit. "You deserve a break sometimes, though. We all do."

George nods. He's never been one to talk about his feelings, to pour his heart out into the cold air, but hanging out with Clay always makes him want to do exactly that. Talking with him is so easy that it nearly hurts.

"I was kind of like that when I was younger, too. Like, getting super, super obsessed with figure skating to the point where it was kind of unhealthy." He looks back up, and Clay's looking at him with an unreadable expression on his face. "Were you like that?"

“When I was a kid?” Clay asks. George nods, and Clay takes it as an invitation to keep talking. “I don’t know. I mean, I was a really, really bad kid when I was younger. I always got into trouble. But I cleaned up my act for university, you know?”

George scrunches up his nose. He can’t really imagine the thought of Clay being anything but the star-speckled boy who tutored him in literary non-fiction. “Really? You were?”

Clay laughs. The wind picks up around them. “I had a lot of feelings, and I didn’t know how to get them out of me. It was just typical angsty teenager bullshit, you know?”

“What about now?”

He looks back down at his feet and allows the wind to carry his swing forward. “I throw myself into my studies, I guess. And I write my book, I write how I feel. And other things, like... just talking about it. To people like you.”

George’s heart feels caught in his throat. “People like me?”

“Yeah,” Clay tells him. He swings himself to the side, nudges George in the shoulder. “I don’t know. I guess I don’t have many people who I can talk to like this.”

“What about Sapnap?” George asks.

“Sapnap’s cool, but he’s not you,” Clay tells him, eyes crinkled in the corners.

Even though the snow is starting to fall heavier, George’s face has never been so warm. It feels like torture. He doesn’t know why he allowed Sapnap to plant that seed of hope into his mind. Things would be so much easier if he never asked Clay to hang out, but maybe just for tonight, he can let himself indulge in it.

George sighs and crumples his empty shawarma wrapper in his fist, and he grins as he nudges Clay back. “I’m glad they stuck me with that stupid English course.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah,” George says. “Otherwise we never would’ve become friends.”

Clay avoids his gaze. For a moment, George thinks that he’s done something wrong, but Clay takes a deep breath and plants both his feet down onto the ground so he’s held steady. “I kind of wanted to tell you something, actually.”

George is confused. “You did?”

“Yeah,” says Clay. “I, um. When we hung out. At the winter festival.”

George’s heart climbs up in his throat. Is this what Clay was talking about back at the museum? Nothing makes any sense anymore. “What about it?”

Suddenly, Clay looks up at him, earnest green eyes meeting his. “When Sapnap made that stupid bet with you...” He takes another breath, like he’s trying to build himself up to something. “I lied, when I told him I meant it as just a friend thing. It was a date, sort of, but I was just... too scared to say anything.”

George blinks back at him. All the air in his lungs escapes him. “Oh.”

He’s never seen Clay look so nervous. “Oh?”

“And when we went to the museum...”

“I kind of wanted it to be a date too,” Clay admits.

George is still trying to catch his mind up to the world around him. Everything in his body is reeling with something between shock and excitement. He doesn’t even know what’s going on, only knows that maybe Sapnap was right earlier today when he said that Clay liked him, and that he’s warm all the way to his toes despite the biting wind.

Has Clay always looked at him like that? Has George never noticed?

“You like guys?” he blurts out.

“I do,” Clay tells him, cheeks flushed. It’s probably not from the cold. He clears his throat. “Is that... bad? For you?”

“No,” George breathes out. “I mean, I like guys too.” His mouth stutters for a moment as he tries to pick and choose his next words carefully. “You like... me?”

“I do, George,” Clay says, and the words are rushing out of him now, spilling out of his mouth before George even has a chance to reply. “I like you, so, so much.” He shuffles closer, and the chains on the swing creak as they’re pulled until the two of them are beside each other: shoulder-to-shoulder, eye-to-eye. “Do you like me?”

George doesn’t know what else he can do except be honest. “Yeah,” he says. Something lights up behind Clay’s eyes, and before George can help it, he’s talking again. “Can I kiss you?”

“Yeah,” Clay replies, throat gravelly.

George doesn’t know who leans in first. He just knows that they’re too close, dangerously so, and he can feel Clay’s soft breaths fanning over his nose. Their lips brush together. This is it, George thinks. Two boys sitting on a swing set in the freezing cold. Everything that’s been building up since September is finally coming to its apex.

When Clay’s lips lean in to capture his, they’re warm and sweet and everything that George has ever wanted. There’s a tingling that’s building up the base of his spine. George leans into it, presses his hands against either side of Clay’s face. He’s never felt this way with anyone, with anyone except Dream—

But Clay pulls away with a gasp. “Wait,” he says, chest heaving. George’s heart feels like it’s plummeted by fifty stories. “We can’t.”

Why? George wants to ask, disappointed, but there’s no point in asking anyway. He can’t kiss Clay, not when he’s just realized that half his heart belongs to the boy he’s spent every night with on the ice since the beginning of the year. That wouldn’t be fair to either of them. Regret sinks its claws into his skin. “I shouldn’t—”

Before he can finish, Clay jumps to his feet and backs away from the swing set. “George,” he chokes out. “George, George, George.”

“Clay,” George tries again, standing from his seat on the swing, but Clay’s holding out a hand in front of himself like he doesn’t want George to come any closer. George’s voice falters. “I can’t do this.”

“Me neither,” Clay tells him, tripping over his own words. His shoulders shake as he takes a deep,

wobbling breath. “I’m sorry. I’m— I’m gonna go home.”

George feels like throwing up. He wants Clay to kiss him again, wants to run his fingers through his hair, but he can’t if neither of them can commit. “Okay,” he mumbles, frozen to the ground.

He feels so incredibly lost, like there’s something that he’s still missing, something that no one seems to be able to tell him yet. If Clay really meant it when he said he liked him, what went wrong all of a sudden? What changed?

But George doesn’t ask any of this, no matter how much he wants to. His mouth has gone dry with something that makes his stomach turn. He watches Clay curse to himself and stumble out of the park until he’s going, going, gone.

Chapter End Notes

i want shawarma. Said this on my priv twitter while i was writing this but I think we should all go out and get shawarma together. What do u think #Shawarma
#FigureSkatesAndHockeyBladesShawarmaMeetup

[twitter](#)
[tumblr](#)

secrets and championships

Chapter Summary

Dream shakes his head and looks down, throat bobbing with the motions. “I just — I need to do this before I get too scared and back out.”

George is frozen. His heart is pounding a thousand beats a minute and slamming against his chest. “Do what?”

The rink goes silent for a moment, until Dream says, “Close your eyes, George.”

Without thinking too long about it, because he trusts Dream with his life, he does.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

They board the tour bus for the championships on a Friday.

George hands his suitcase off to the bus driver so it can go into the luggage compartment, and then he’s tugging his backpack straps tight around his shoulder as he steps up the stairs and inside. A hand clamps down on his shoulder — it shocks him for a moment, but he’s relieved when he turns back around.

“You scared me,” George says. On the step below from him, Sapnap grins as he pushes George along and into the aisle.

“Good thing we’re gonna be bus buddies for the next three hours,” Sapnap tells him. “Hurry up. There’s a line behind us.”

Most of the figure skating team’s already taken their seats on the bus, which leaves the rest of the guys on the hockey team lining up behind them. They’re roughhousing, shoving each other back and forth as their sneakers scuff on top of the parking lot pavement.

“Like animals,” Sapnap says.

George laughs and replies, “Yeah, but you love it. You’re one of them.”

They sit somewhere near the back and sink into the bus seat cushions. Sapnap allows George to take the window seat, and George’s head thumps against the glass as soon as he’s got the opportunity to let his neck go lax. In all honesty, he thought he would be spending this bus ride falling asleep with his earbuds in, but it seems like Sapnap’s got other plans.

George peers out the window and tries to catch sight of anyone who could be Dream, but he doesn’t even really know where to start. None of them sound quite like him or reach his height. Perhaps Sapnap’s able to read his mind, because he’s nudging George back to reality with the sound of his voice.

“Dream never rides with us to games,” he says. “I don’t even know how he always shows up, but he does.”

George has never been more confused. “Huh,” he sounds, trying to seem indifferent.

The rest of the hockey team loads up into their seats, and Sapnap’s attention on George is lost as he leans across the aisle to talk to a few of the other guys. The whole bus rumbles as the engine starts up, and before long, they’re pulling out of the parking lot and the views of the city are whizzing past them.

When they drive past one of the subway station entrances, George is forced to slink down into his seat at the memory that resurfaces. Clay... Clay hasn’t talked to him since that night, but in all fairness, George hasn’t talked to him either. Their text messages have been unbearably silent, and George hasn’t seen him at their usual spot in the library. If Sapnap’s noticed it, he hasn’t said anything.

George still doesn’t understand what went wrong. Clay seemed so open, so honest when their eyes met in the darkness of the park, but something must have clicked in his mind as soon as their lips touched together. George has been trying to put the pieces of Clay’s secrets together for ages, but every time he seems to get close, Clay manages to push him away.

But none of that’s important now, not when George has a championship to win tomorrow. He doesn’t have time to think about Clay. It’ll be late at night by the time they arrive at the hotel, and so tomorrow morning, the entire figure skating team is getting up bright and early to get into costume before they’re due to perform.

The idea of it is nauseating. George is so, so anxious.

Luckily, Sapnap’s there to distract him from delving too deep into his thoughts. He pokes George in the shoulder before he’s introducing him to the entirety of the hockey team, and the bus drives on.

When they arrive, George’s legs are aching as he steps onto solid ground. He shakes them out, grabs his suitcase, and trudges along with the rest of the figure skating team into their hotel. It’s a small, cheap kind of thing, but it’s just across the street from the arena they’re skating at. George can see the top of the arena from the view in his room, and nervousness swoops in his stomach at the thought of it.

It takes ten minutes for him to slip away while everyone’s distracted to sneak inside.

It’s freezing outside, snowbanks lining the sidewalks, but his heart’s pounding as he jogs across the street and towards the arena. He needs to see it, needs to understand the full scope of it before he’s meant to skate tomorrow morning. Tomorrow’s championship is the biggest competition of his life so far. If he’s off-beat to his song because he’s underestimated the length of the rink, he’s never going to forgive himself.

The doors to the arena are miraculously unlocked. When George slips inside, he’s met by the low, droning noises of fluorescent lights buzzing above him. It takes a few minutes for him to find his way to the rink, but once he does, his breath is tugged right out of him.

It’s gorgeous — the stands seem to stretch on for eternity, and the ceiling’s high, high enough that George has to strain his neck to see the scoreboard above, giant screens shut off for the night. There’s a residual chill that seeps into his bones from the air, and the whole place smells like that vague tinge of warm rubber floors and burnt coffee.

The ice is the best part, though. It’s smooth and glossy with clear, freshly painted lines, and it’s a

properly sized rink, bigger than any of the ones George used to skate at back in England. He can't wait to skate on it tomorrow, and he steps closer towards the ice to get a better look.

"George," someone says from behind him. The gravity of their tone nearly startles him out of his own skin. "I need to talk to you."

He whips around. It's Dream, he can tell by the number stretching across the front of his jersey, but there's no hockey skates, no stick, no padding bulking him up from under his clothes. It's just him in his jersey and helmet, and he looks strangely vulnerable.

"Hi," George says, carefully. "What're you doing here?"

"I was looking for you," Dream says. He fidgets with the hem of his jersey. "I've, um. I've been trying to talk to you for ages, but then I was too busy, or too scared."

"What?" George is confused. "About what?"

But the words keep spilling out of Dream's mouth like he hadn't even heard George at all. "I just — it sucks, because, like, you don't deserve it. None of the guys on the team do either, and I don't know what to do anymore because it's fucking killing me inside, George." His voice is shakier now. George doesn't like it. "I've been meaning to talk to you for a long, long time."

There's something here that George is missing, but he doesn't know what it is, doesn't understand what's going on. The cold air of the rink sting against his cheeks. "What— you're scaring me, Dream."

He's never seen him like this, small and weak and shivering like a gust of wind would be enough to blow him away. Dream's legs look strange without his skates strapped to his feet, and his hands are shaking without his gloves on. His voice sounds like he might cry.

"I feel so guilty," he whispers.

George doesn't know what to say, so he just says, "Dream," and hopes that the name's enough to tether them both back to solid ground.

Dream shakes his head and looks down, throat bobbing with the motions. "I just — I need to do this before I get too scared and back out."

George is frozen. His heart is pounding a thousand beats a minute and slamming against his chest. "Do what?"

The rink goes silent for a moment, until Dream says, "Close your eyes, George."

Without thinking too long about it, because he trusts Dream with his life, he does.

The world shutters into darkness around him, and George's face twists in confusion. What is he doing? What is Dream doing? There's a shuffle, the sounds of fabric on fabric, and George becomes acutely aware of the sounds of his own breathing the longer he keeps his eyes shut.

"Okay," Dream says, weakened. "You can— you can open them."

When George blinks his eyes open, all the breath is stolen from his body. Dream has taken his helmet off, but it's not Dream at all — it's Clay, standing in front of him on two swaying legs with all the colour drained from his face. He looks sick with anxiety.

Suddenly, everything makes sense — the glances they shared in the library, the way Clay had sobbed into his shoulder at the museum, the look on his face after they kissed on the swing set — but at the same time, George has never felt more lost. If Clay is Dream, if George has been spending all his spare time with the same boy since September, then why didn't he ever say anything?

"George?" Clay asks, fingers gripped so tightly on the sides of his helmet that it looks like it might shatter. "Say something. Please."

His words waver. "I don't..."

"I didn't mean to lie to you," Clay tells him. His eyes are starting to well up with tears. "I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to lie to anyone, but it just happened, and I *liked it*, and I couldn't stop it. And I felt so, so terrible after we — after the park that I just couldn't do it any longer."

But George starts shaking his head. Humiliation burns him down to his bones. "What do you mean, you didn't mean to lie to anyone?"

"I didn't have a choice," Clay pleads. His voice is clearer now that he's got his helmet and mouthguard off, and George curses himself for not putting two and two together earlier. "You have to believe me."

"You always have a choice," George points out, growing angry. He doesn't even fully understand why, just knows that he's never felt more betrayed by who he thought were two different people. "So, what?"

Clay sounds breathless. "What?"

"Were you just *playing* with my feelings? Leading me along?" George wraps both his arms around himself and tries to back away, but Clay keeps reaching, reaching, reaching. "Because it's not funny. I thought we were friends."

"We are," Clay tells him, sniffling. "I wasn't lying at the park. I like you so much, George, but I —" He gasps. "I get it. I get it."

George's heart aches. It feels like it's been torn out, stomped on, and split into pieces. This isn't what was supposed to happen. He was supposed to get through championships and then sort out all his feelings afterwards, but Clay's just taken those all plans and turned them upside down.

He feels like he can't breathe. "I can't — I'm not doing this," George chokes out. "Not tonight."

"What do—" Clay starts, but he's cut off.

"I have to get up early tomorrow to skate," George says bitterly, brushing past Clay and heading towards the door.

Just as he's about to storm outside, Clay sounds so vulnerable that it nearly stops him in his tracks. "George," he pleads.

There's no time to think, not when the pressure of the championships is pulling down on George's shoulders like dead weight. He swallows. "I'm leaving, Clay," he says, and then he's pushing through the doors and running back towards his hotel.

Later, when George collapses into bed with bloodshot eyes from crying in the shower, he doesn't get a wink of sleep.

He's exhausted as he gets dressed and does his hair for the competition, so much so that it feels like the ground is swaying beneath him. One of his teammates offers him an energy drink, and once he gulps it down, the pounding in his head seems to subside.

The dizziness is still in the process of fading away, though. He doesn't know how he's supposed to perform when he can barely stand up straight.

The figure skating team files into the rink one by one. George waits in the stands to be called up for his program, and the entire time, he's bouncing his foot up and down in a nervous tick. He's wearing this blue, glittery top for his costume, and five minutes into the pairs freeskate, his hands are covered in glitter from wiping his clammy palms down his front. If he looks hard enough at the door, he can nearly see the phantom image of Dream — *Clay* — from last night, begging him not to leave.

The worst part of it all is that despite everything, there's still that selfish, unexplainable *pull* that ties him and Clay together. That's what makes all this hurt the most. George spent hours in bed that night thinking about it, wondering what would've happened if he had stayed. Maybe they could've talked it out, or he could've let Clay cry in his arms again, or they could've kissed again like that night at the park.

But thoughts like that are dangerous, George tells himself, especially when he's jolted back to reality by the sound of his teammates applauding the last skater on the ice. Suddenly, he feels an impending sense of dread. He's up next.

This is it. George isn't going to let anything ruin this for him. When he's in the rink, losing himself to the rhythm of his movements, he won't have time to think about anything else other than the sounds of his skates scraping against the ice.

He's so, so nervous, even as he's stepping onto the ice and waiting for his music to start playing. There's a building pressure in his chest that his mind can't help but drift towards. The only thing he can do now is his best.

Falling into motion once the music starts is far too easy. He's run through this routine so many times that he could do it in his sleep — his skates glide across the ice, effortless, and his legs work off of pure muscle memory as he steps into his next move. He's pouring everything he has into this performance, and every bit of desperation in his mind seeps into his toes. Skating like this, he's never been so focused.

He uses his toe pick to help launch him into a quad Lutz, and then skates out into a flying sit spin. This is where he feels at home: on the ice, in the cold, skates carrying him across the rink. Here, he feels nearly fluid, carried along by pure impulse.

Near the end of his program is where George starts to get nervous. He and his coaches have been working on his triple axel for ages, and even though he's landed it in practice before, there's still that lingering doubt that creeps into his mind every time he goes for it. It's so fucking terrifying — and that's exactly what he thinks to himself as he skates into it anyways.

He steps forward into position, kicks through with his free leg as hard as he possibly can, and spins three full times in the air before *landing it*. His skate wobbles just barely on the landing, but with the way his team's going absolutely insane in the stands, he hopes that somehow it'll go unnoticed.

Even though his performance wasn't perfect — it was more emotional than technical, and he's going to lose points for it — he's never been prouder of himself. The judges look impressed from

their seats, high above the rink, and for now, George just has to hope that it's enough.

When he's stepping off the rink with his heartbeat thrumming in his ears and a flush spread across his face from overexertion, he sees Clay, standing in the shadows by the door and watching him with an indiscernible expression on his face.

George blinks. Before he can say anything, his teammates and coaches surround him with cheers and praise, and then Clay disappears right from his vision.

The hockey semifinals happen later that night, after the rink's been resurfaced and the figure skating championships end. The figure skating team won't get their competition results until tomorrow morning, but if Dream knows anything, he knows that the men's freeskate gold medal belongs to George. He deserves it more than anyone.

Dream's hockey stick is bouncing from hand to hand as he walks towards the rink. It's hot and stuffy and humid underneath his helmet, but he's used to it enough by now. Guilt claws his stomach up into tatters as he watches his teammates pat each other on the back. He wonders if George has told any of them who he is yet.

He can't think about that right now, though, not when all he needs to focus on is winning this game. Dream remembers this kind of anxiety: it's the same one he felt last year at the semifinals, just ten times worse. He doesn't do well with pressure, and he does even worse with guilt.

There's far more people than expected in the stands, cheering and roaring in excitement. Dream tries to tune all that noise out as he steps onto the rink and sizes up the competition. It's some team from further south called the Vipers, who are notorious for playing aggressively, and he takes a deep breath as he tries to snap his mind into focus.

When it's time for the face-off, the rink goes deathly quiet as Dream holds his stick in position for the puck to drop. He's sweating under his hockey padding despite the cold.

But as much as he tries to pay attention, to keep his eyes drawn to the ice, his mind can't help but wander. What if George is in the stands, watching his every move? Worse yet, Dream thinks nervously, what if George never wants to see him again—

The puck clatters to the ice. Dream's too slow as he swipes for it, and number Twenty on the Vipers snatches it away and sends it flying towards his teammates.

Dream doesn't have the chance to be angry at himself. His heart is pounding in his chest as he tries to catch up to the puck. Out of the corner of his eye, he sees number Fifty-Two of the Vipers drive the puck across the centre line, and he chases after him in an attempt to steal it back. But the other team is quicker, stronger, and Fifty-Two zig-zags right around the rest of Dream's teammates at the defense line and sends the puck flying into the net before Callahan even realizes that it's too late.

It catches in the top right corner. The crowd explodes with energy.

The rest of the first period goes exactly the same way. Dream's distracted the entire time — he's too late every time he's prompted to chase after the puck, and when he does get in possession of it, he can't manage to evade any of the Vipers practically shoving him into the boards — and by the end of it, the Lions have zero points compared to the Vipers' two.

Dream wants to curl up into a ball in the player box and never come out. He's never done this poorly at a game ever. Sapnap must notice, because in the break between the first and second periods, he takes Dream by the sleeve of his jersey and drags him right out of the arena and into the

empty halls.

“What’s up with you, dude?” he asks, stick tapping incessantly against the ground. When Dream doesn’t answer, he continues, “Seriously. I think coach is about to bench you if you don’t get your shit together.”

Dream groans and lets his back thump against the wall. “I know. I’m sorry. I’m just… distracted.”

“We don’t have the time to be distracted,” Sapnap tells him. He eyes Dream warily through his helmet. Perhaps he can tell how frayed Dream is at the seams, because before Dream can reply, he sighs and settles himself beside him against the brick wall. “Distracted about what?”

A long stretch of silence comes before Dream says, quietly, “I just don’t want to disappoint you guys.”

Sapnap scrunches up his nose. “Like how?”

“Like by losing,” Dream says. “Like, by lying to everyone.”

Turning to face him, Sapnap frowns. “Lying to everyone?” he asks. “Dream?”

Dream takes a deep, shaky breath. If George already knows who he is, what’s the point of keeping this a secret any longer?

His hands are shaking as he tugs off his helmet. The muggy, static air of the hallway hits his face as soon as his sweaty hair comes free, and Sapnap’s left staring at him with wide eyes. There’s a moment where Dream thinks that Sapnap’s going to yell at him, or punch him, or storm out, but none of that comes.

Instead: “You massive fucking *idiot*,” Sapnap huffs out, and then he falls forward and tugs Dream into a hug. “Why did you do that?”

Dream doesn’t know what to do, so he just hugs Sapnap back uncomfortably, hockey stick and helmet and padding getting in their way. “I was scared, I think.”

Sapnap’s voice comes out muffled. “I’m so fucking mad at you. You’re telling me everything after the game.”

Dream’s exhales come out wobbly. “I know,” he says.

A familiar roar of cheers comes from the doors to the arena, and Sapnap pulls away, looking at Dream carefully. They need to go back soon for the second period. Self-consciousness twists in Dream’s chest at the thought.

“I can, like — *see* your brain working from all the way over here, dude,” Sapnap tells him. “Stop thinking so hard about how you’re doing. Just get out there and play.”

Dream inhales, nodding. The Lions need this. People are counting on him, and they’ve still got two more periods to go until the end of the game. They can bring it back in time.

“Right,” Dream croaks out.

He swallows as he shoves his helmet back down onto his head and steps out into the arena.

Holy Cow!

changed some things re: triple axel shenanigans in ch12 but it doesn't really change too much other than the fact that george can now land his triple axel. Bc someone messaged me and then i thought about it and i went Yeah he works so hard he deserves to land it after all the bullshit i put him through. So he does

[twitter](#)

[tumblr](#)

dream and george

Chapter Summary

Out of the corner of his eye, he sees Clay looking at him. Clay's gripping hard onto his seat again, hard enough that his hands are straining at the force. "I just didn't want to feel like I was stuck in a box," he says.

"It's okay," George tells him. Shakily, he reaches out over the seat in between them, palm facing up in a silent invitation. "You don't have to feel like that anymore."

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Hey," Sapnap says.

George turns around to look at him. Cool night air hits him in the cheeks, and he winces at the sensation. Behind him, Sapnap steps over a thin plane of ice on the sidewalk so they can sit side-by-side on a rickety little bench facing the roadside outside of the hotel. Wind bites at their skin with every car that whizzes by.

"Hi," George says, tugging his coat a little tighter around his arms. It's so cold. He doesn't know why he's here, just knows that he had to get out of his hotel room before he went insane. "How was your game?"

"Won in overtime. The finals are tomorrow night," Sapnap tells him, knocking their knees together. "You didn't come and watch?"

George shakes his head. "I was there for the first bit," he says, and then clears his throat. "I left halfway through. It was fun, though."

A long, weighted pause comes before Sapnap's talking again. "You don't have to lie about it, George."

George drives both his heels into the pavement. "Who said I was lying?"

"I did," Sapnap says. George can feel his eyes on him, but he's got his gaze trained at the arena across the street, watching as the posters on the windows flutter in the February wind. "We live together. I know you."

George grips at the bench under him to try to ground himself. Part of him wants to cry, but he feels like these past few days have made him run out of tears. "It's stupid."

"It's not," Sapnap tells him, taking a deep breath. "He told me what happened, you know."

"He did?"

"Yeah," Sapnap says. They both settle into a sense of quiet, until Sapnap opens his mouth again. "Clay's the dumbest person I've ever met."

Somehow, the insult is enough to make George crack into a smile. He and Sapnap look at each other, grinning, before they're bursting out into bright laughter and shattering the silence of the street. Everything feels so, so ridiculous that George is nearly tearing up from laughing. He doesn't know how he got here: sitting on a bench in the freezing cold, an ocean away from home, lamenting about the guy he's been maybe sort of into since the beginning of the school year.

Once George has come down from his hilarity, he's left clutching his stomach and trying to catch his breath. "He lied, though," he groans. "He's such a fucking idiot."

Sapnap huffs out one last laugh and tugs his hat tighter over his head. "Yeah. He did. But, like, I get it."

George turns to look at him incredulously. "You get it?"

"I mean, what he did was messed up," Sapnap says, continuing on. "Don't get me wrong — he lied to me, you, the team — all of us. But in a way, I get it. I get it. I've been friends with him — Clay — for years now. I've seen what he's like, why he did what he did. And I get it."

George frowns as he sinks backwards, letting his back fall against the bench. "Yeah, but *I* don't get it."

"Because you haven't talked to him," Sapnap insists. "He wants to talk to you, George."

George doesn't answer, just stares at the way the streetlamps bounce off of the piles of snow on the curb. It's been nearly impossible for him to focus on anything except Clay ever since he's finished competing at the championships, and he hates it. No matter how much George wants to push Clay away, he still wants him close.

But he doesn't want to admit that just yet, at least not to Sapnap, so he eases himself back onto his feet, muscles aching at the action. "I'm gonna go back and go to bed," he coughs out. "Competition results are tomorrow morning."

Grinning, Sapnap hops to his feet. "I'm coming with you," he says, nudging George in the shoulder as they walk back towards the hotel.

George laughs and shoves him away just slightly. "Get your own sidewalk."

"You love me," Sapnap teases, trailing after him. "We're best friends, George. Admit it."

Screwing up his face in mock disgust, George asks, "Who said we were best friends?"

Sapnap gapes at him. "You're the worst," he says.

George twists his lips up into a grin. Beside him, Sapnap barks out a laugh, and then they're stepping into the warm embrace of the hotel sliding doors.

George doesn't go to bed.

He can't, really, not when his mind feels like it's constantly running on overdrive every time he's left alone with his thoughts for too long. It's fine during the day — he's busy most of the time with his teammates or coaches, but at night, every thought seems to be amplified in his head.

But at the end of it all, it's twelve in the morning, and George ends up at the arena again, pushing past the doors and slipping inside. Even though he hasn't got his skates with him, he hopes that the

familiar chill and scent of the place will clear his thoughts.

Instead, he sees Clay, pacing in circles around the outer edge of the rink like a lost puppy.

George doesn't know what to do. He's stuck there, frozen in front of the door, until the sound of it clicking closed echoes throughout the empty arena. On instinct, Clay shoots around. He looks halfway between relieved and worried.

"George," he says, breathless. "You're here?"

Nervously, George twists his own fingers together. "Yeah." He steps one step down the stairs, unsure if he should stay or leave. He's never felt so out of place. "Um. I didn't... Sapnap said you wanted to talk to me?"

"I did," Clay says, and then he's interrupting himself. "I do. I just want to explain."

George walks closer towards him with hesitant steps until he can get a good look at Clay's face, worn with exhaustion. If anything, he wants closure from this, wants to understand what went wrong, wants to know what's going on inside Clay's head.

So he swallows his nerves. "Okay," he says.

They sit together in the stands, except Clay seems wary, almost like he's afraid that George will break if they get too close. He leaves a buffer seat in between them. Something in George wants to move over and close that distance, but he doesn't.

The tension hangs there in the air for a moment, staticky and uncomfortable, and Clay opens his mouth to blurt out: "I'm really fucking sorry."

George worries his lips together when he sees the earnest look in his eyes. "About what?"

"Everything," Clay tells him. "I meant it when I said that I didn't mean to lie. I just—" His hands grip tightly onto the plastic seat beneath him, and he takes a deep breath. "Do you ever feel like—like everyone's expecting something from you, all the time?"

George doesn't even have to think about it. He knows that kind of pressure, and he's felt it crawling into his mind every night since he started skating. It's the fear of failure, maybe, or something more along the lines of the fear of letting people down. His breath hitches. "Yeah."

"That's how I felt," Clay croaks. "I mean, I know it sounds stupid. But everyone, all my friends and family, saw me as this, like... constantly smart, and polite, and hardworking guy. And it was just so much pressure."

Shaking his head, George says, "I still don't understand, though."

Clay drives his palms into his eyes, covering his vision like he's too afraid to look George in the eye. "I was so, so stupid. Sapnap knew I played hockey in high school, but he thought I quit. And then I showed up to hockey tryouts last year, and Sapnap had already tried out, so he wasn't there—" He sniffles. "No one there knew who I was, and I liked it."

George doesn't know what to say. What is he supposed to do when suddenly everything and nothing makes sense all at once?

Clay's voice comes out gravelly, chest tight. "That's why I put on my stupid fucking helmet," he says, and then forces out a laugh. "It doesn't even matter in the end, though, because now

everyone's counting on me to help win the championships, so it's the same pressure either way."

A long pause stretches on as his words seep in. George looks at him carefully, studying the tangled mess that his hair's become and the grown out stubble on his jaw. He wants to ask when they became like this, when study sessions in the library suddenly become something more, but the truth is that he thinks it doesn't really matter.

It takes all of George's limited energy to reply, "I get it."

Clay freezes. He removes his hands from his face. "You do?"

"Yeah," George tells him. He's afraid that his words are going to come out weak, so he digs his nails into his palms to steel himself. "I mean, I get that kind of pressure. And I get why you did what you did." He smiles, just slightly. "Even if you're still a huge idiot for it."

For a moment, Clay doesn't say anything, just stares at him with watery eyes, and then he breaks into a small, matching smile of his own. He shakes his head. "You're too nice to me, George."

"I'm not too nice," George tells him, looking down at his lap. "I just... I moved here, alone. I get what it feels like to want to do something without anyone knowing who you are."

Out of the corner of his eye, he sees Clay looking at him. Clay's gripping hard onto his seat again, hard enough that his hands are straining at the force. "I just didn't want to feel like I was stuck in a box," he says.

"It's okay," George tells him. Shakily, he reaches out over the seat in between them, palm facing up in a silent invitation. "You don't have to feel like that anymore."

Clay looks at him, eyes filled with something between surprise and sincerity, and then looks back down at George's hand. "Yeah," Clay breathes out.

He reaches back over the seat, slots their palms together, and intertwines their fingers. George's heart nearly beats out of his chest. Despite everything, he still wants Clay close.

Feeling bold, George tightens his grip. "So..." he trails off, "did you mean it? At the park?"

"Of course I did," Clay tells him, nearly instantaneously. George feels his fingers falter against the back of his palm for a moment. "Did you... do you still like me?"

George allows himself to indulge in his memories for a moment: studying together in the library, drinking hot chocolate at the winter festival, hugging at the museum, and skating together almost every night since the beginning of the year. Maybe he's always sort of liked Clay, as Dream or not, this whole time. Maybe he's only just started to realize it now.

A slow, slow flush stretches across George's face. "Yeah," he says. "I do."

"Okay," Clay says, a little nervously. He runs his free hand through his hair and moves over one seat, closing the distance between them. "Is it okay if I..."

George already knows what he's going to ask before he even says it. "Yes," he replies, and then he's leaning over the seats to kiss him.

His eyes fall shut when Clay squeezes his palm with one hand and slides the other up to cup his jaw. There's a sudden warmth that rises to the centre of George's chest despite the cold, and there's the gentle, sweet push of Clay's lips against his. George feels like his stomach has turned upside

down with butterflies.

When they pull apart, Clay's smiling wider than he's ever seen him, and there's something there glimmering in his eyes. He leans forward to press their foreheads together. "You have *no* idea how long I've wanted to do that."

George grins back at him. "You're an idiot," he says.

"You're the bigger idiot," Clay tells him, jabbing him in the shoulder with his finger. "Talked to me about *me* and didn't even realize."

"Oh my *God*," George exclaims, "and you *let* me?"

Clay doesn't say anything. He just laughs that dumb, loud, wheezy laugh of his that George loves, and grins against George's lips as he leans in for another kiss.

It's early the next morning when George ends up at the rink again, this time surrounded by the rest of the figure skating team while they wait for the results of the championships to be announced. Clay had told him last night how well he skated, how he deserved to get first place, but there's still a lingering sense of doubt in George's mind that makes him feel faint. He wants to win this more than anything.

He's twirling his own fingers together in a nervous tick and staring at the judges when he sees someone waving at him from across the arena. It's Clay — no jersey, no helmet, just him looking soft in a sweater and a pair of sweatpants and smiling brightly at George.

He doesn't even look surprised when George wins gold in his program.

It's so, so perfect and warm and exciting. George's teammates are jostling him back and forth with their congratulations. He's been working for this for so fucking long, and pride flickers in his chest when he realizes that it paid off. His cheeks hurt from smiling.

The school wins first place overall too, and the entire team crowds together on the ice to get their picture taken with their awards. Someone loops a gold medal around George's neck. The weight of it is comforting — it reminds him of where he is, how he got here, and where he wants to go next. Even though he's exhausted every night and there's always so much to do, he thinks that he'd like to keep skating forever.

And when he and Clay meet in the middle of the rink, after everyone else has filtered outside, Clay's got his hands in his pockets. He's rocking back and forth on his heels nervously. "Hi," he says.

George smiles up at him. "Hi."

"You won," Clay tells him. "I told you. You deserve it."

I know, George wants to tease, but the reassurance is so soothing that he doesn't. Instead, he reaches over to poke Clay in the sternum. "You're here. No helmet," he says.

Clay reaches up, grasps George's finger, and pulls George's hand so it's laying flat across his chest. His heart is beating slow and steady underneath. "I'm here," he repeats back, ears tipped red. "Had to come out and congratulate you in person."

"How does it feel?" George asks.

Something about this feels incomprehensibly abnormal and familiar all at once: seeing Clay's face, lit by the rink lights, surrounded by the cold. George wants to look at him for the rest of his life.

Clay grins at him. "It feels really, really good."

"You ready?"

Sapnap plonks himself down on the bench next to Clay in the locker room. It's loud and rowdy inside as everyone gets ready, skates and hockey sticks thumping against the rubber floors. Something about tonight feels indescribably different than any game that Clay's played before — it feels like he's seeing everything through a new perspective, and maybe Sapnap's seeing him through a new perspective too.

Clay hasn't got his helmet on for once, and surprisingly, everyone on the team's treating him like... normal. Like nothing has changed. It's relieving to not feel constantly suffocated and stuck in a trap of his own creation. He feels guilty for never hanging out with them outside of practice, for never riding the bus with them to games, but something in him tells him that it's never too late to start.

"Ready as I'll ever be," Clay says, tugging on the sleeves of his jersey. "I feel good about tonight."

Sapnap grins at him. "You better," he replies, knocking their shoulders together. "One more speech from the captain before the championships?"

Clay furrows his brows together and allows his voice to trail off into uncertainty. Rallying his team together is second nature at this point, but he's not sure if he's feeling up for it tonight. "I don't know..."

"C'mon," Sapnap urges. "Just a small one?" When Clay shakes his head at him, he starts pounding his stick on the ground and chanting, "Speech, speech, speech," over and over again like a broken record until the whole locker room's chiming in.

The walls seem to be vibrating from the sheer energy and volume of it, and that's enough to make Clay groan and pick himself up off the bench. "Fine," he relents. He figures that if they want that championship trophy to be theirs, he's going to need to make sure that everyone's hyped up enough for the occasion.

Sapnap whoops, and the team goes quiet as they wait to hear what he has to say. It takes Clay back to the first game of the season, before things got too complicated, before he started liking George. They've all come a long, long way.

"Okay," Clay says, and he takes a long, deep breath. "I wanna thank you guys for an awesome season. It's been so awesome playing out there with you guys, and I'm so proud that we've gotten this far." He stops, looks over everyone's faces. It feels like he can finally *see*. "And no matter what happens tonight, we're gonna play hard and aggressive, but with precision. With the technique we've been working on all year." He grins. "We've fucking *got* this."

His team explodes into cheers, banging their sticks on the ground again, until their coach is forced to come in and calm them all down. They go over the plays that they've planned out before, make a few last minute decisions, and then they're filing out of the locker room and into the arena.

It's roaring inside. There are students and family and friends filling up nearly every seat in the stands. The Lions go through their regular pre-game ritual — Clay stands at the gate and fist-bumps all of them as they step onto the ice, and he's smiling under his helmet the entire time. He

catches George in the stands with the rest of the figure skating team; they wave wildly at each other, and the sight of George makes Clay's skin warm. He's always had that effect on him.

Thinking about tonight's game feels like a universal truth: the sky is blue, Clay is in love with George, and they're going to win this year. They've all worked so hard to get here, and they're not going to let any other team get in their way.

Tonight's final game is against none other than the Warriors. The Lions haven't played against them since the playoffs started, and as confident as he is, Clay's slightly nervous about it. They lost in the finals to the Warriors last year. He can only hope that this time, the universe is on their side.

He's grinning under his helmet as he takes his place at the centre line. Across from him, Techno reaches out so they can shake hands. It's been a while since the last time they saw each other. "You're losing tonight," Clay tells him.

But Techno just grins back at him. "I don't wanna hear anything from someone who wears a *fishbowl*."

Before long, the arena is quieting down as they all crane to focus on the face-off. Clay takes in a deep, shuddering breath as he slides his hockey stick into position and waits for the puck to drop. He knows how the Warriors like to play aggressively, and so that's exactly why he and the Lions planned for playing with more precision today. Being aggressive only leaves more room for mistakes that they can take advantage of.

When the puck falls, Techno's first to make contact with it, but Clay's faster. He steals it right out of his grasp and sends it flying across the ice — Sam's the one to catch it, and he barrels down the centre line before anyone else can catch up to him. Punz is already waiting on the other end of the rink. Sam flips the puck up and passes it, and then Punz fires it right into the net without even hesitating.

It happens so quickly that Clay nearly misses it — the puck just barely misses the goalie's glove, it lands in the top corner of the netting, and then the whole arena's on their feet and cheering. The Lions all surround each other with grins and pats on the back. Clay breathes out a sigh of relief as he pulls away. It's an amazing start. They've just got the rest of the game left to go.

By the end of the first period, they're tied 1-1. Sapnap's just come back from the penalty box after being sent there for cross-checking while fighting for the puck, and Clay can tell that he's itching for a chance to get a goal in.

"You've got this," Clay tells him on the sidelines. "You know what you're doing. Don't let them get in your head."

Sapnap frowns as he chugs down the last of his water and tosses his bottle to the side. "I should be telling you that," he says.

During the entirety of the second period, Clay's heart is hammering in his chest. The back of his neck is hot with sweat, but he's forced to ignore it in favour of keeping up with the puck. It's exhausting to keep track of it — one second it's beside the Lions' net, and the next, someone is snatching it away and sending it towards Sapnap on the other end of the rink — but he's fast enough to follow it with the motions of his skates scraping against the ice.

At some point, he's fully unguarded, and when Ant gets surrounded by three enemy players he shoots the puck towards him in a desperate, split-second decision. Clay just barely catches it with the blade of his hockey stick, and swerves around one of the Warriors with it before they have a

chance to react.

Then Tommy comes barreling into him and he crashes against the plexiglass.

“You’re fucking *joking*,” Clay groans. The puck is stolen from him, and he watches as Tommy cheers wildly when he scores yet another goal for the Warriors.

Between the second and third periods, when the team is shuffling off to the sidelines, Clay wants to collapse onto the bench. They’re down 1-2. He always gets like this when they’re down in points during a game: his mood starts to falter, and his decisions start to get more and more impulsive.

But he isn’t going to let that affect him, not tonight. The Lions lost in the finals last year and came second for that very reason. If he gets down, then the whole team gets down, and that’ll be their downfall.

So he picks himself up off the bench. Tugs off his helmet to take a big swig of water, runs a hand through his damp hair. “We’ve still got this,” he tells them. “There’s still the third period. Don’t let the scoreboard get to you.”

The team rallies together to cheer before they skate back onto the ice for the last twenty minutes of the game. If they can keep control of the puck for long enough, they’ve still got the chance to get back on top of the game.

Clay’s legs ache as he follows the puck and passes it back and forth between his teammates, but he can never seem to get a clear path to shoot the puck into the net. There are a couple close calls — the Warriors nearly score a few points, but every time, the puck ricochets off of the goalposts or is blocked by Callahan’s knee pads.

Sapnap scores the Lions a second point when he manages to trick one of the Warriors into skating the wrong direction — he heads left, then jukes back right — and sends the puck up and flying into the net. When it catches, the entire team goes wild.

There’s only one minute left on the game clock now. They only need one more goal.

Clay feels a little bit faint as he skates back towards the centre line for the face-off. They’re tied now, and they’re so evenly matched that it’s going to be difficult for either team to score a goal. But this is what he’s been working towards all year long. He’s not going to let any of it go to waste.

There’s a scuffle when the puck drops again, there always is, but he swipes it from right under Techno’s nose and passes it to Sapnap waiting behind him. It all happens so, so fast — Sapnap weaving back and forth between the Warriors’ defensemen in the left wing, Clay following on the right, and then Sapnap passing him the puck without even a second thought because of how in sync they are.

His heart is caught in his throat as he, with all the force he can muster, shoots the puck into the net.

It whizzes past the goalie’s glove, lands in the net, and horns go off all over the arena as the game timer ticks down to zero.

They’ve actually won. Everyone is cheering as the Lions all pile in on each other in a sweaty, bone-crushing hug, but it doesn’t even matter because they’ve actually *won*. Clay doesn’t even know what’s happening — his ears are ringing and his brain’s operating off of pure adrenaline and endorphins alone. He shakes hands with Techno, tells him “good game”, and then someone’s thrusting a trophy into his hands and his whole team is fucking *screaming* with excitement.

He's never been more proud of himself, ever. So much has happened since September, and it only feels like there's so much more left to go.

But at the end of it all, he's handing the trophy off to Sapnap, tugging off his helmet, and then skating towards the sidelines. George is waiting for him on the other end of the boards, and he's grinning wildly at the sight of him. He grins wider when Clay pulls him into a hug so tight that he's lifted off of his feet.

Clay presses his face into the slope of George's shoulders. He has to nearly shout for George to hear him over the sound of the roaring crowd. "Is being this happy supposed to feel like you're dying, a little bit?"

George laughs into his neck. "I think so," he says.

"Okay, good," Clay tells him. He grins. "That's good, because every time I look at you, I think I feel the same way."

And then George laughs at him again as he pulls him in by the collar of his jersey for another kiss.

Time seems to pass differently after they get back from championships.

Figure skating and hockey season are over, but that doesn't stop either of them from taking over the rink nearly every night, laughing when Clay falls on his ass on the ice or when George tries to shoot a puck and ends up sending it halfway across the rink.

University doesn't really wait for anyone — they study together with Sapnap in the library every Wednesday after classes, inhaling the scent of new books and hot chocolate. Sapnap complains about physics, George complains about calculus, and Clay grins at them from over the glow of his laptop screen as he types out the next chapter to his novel-in-progress. He's been working on it a lot more often now that he hasn't got any more hockey practice to go to, and he lets George read every word, lets George gush and fawn and compliment him over it.

Clay also lets himself learn how to break instead of shutting himself away like he used to. When things get too overwhelming, when he misses an assignment due date or when he misses his family back home, he lets himself *talk* to someone about it.

Most times, it's George. George doesn't mind. He'd stay up all night listening to Clay rant if he had to, and he knows that Clay would do the same for him, too.

George arrives at the rink one night to the sight of Clay in his skates and jersey doing laps around the perimeter of the ice. When he hears George come in, he skids to a stop. Shards of ice fly up around him, but he ignores it, leans in to breathe on the plexiglass. A puff of fog appears on the surface. He smiles as he traces a heart over it with his finger.

"For you," he announces, a little too proudly.

George laughs. "You're an idiot," he says, but his skin is warming and his voice sounds a little bit too fond for it to have any bite. When he steps onto the ice, Clay skates in circles around him. "I still don't know what I should call you sometimes," George confesses.

"What do you mean?"

"Whether I should call you Clay or Dream," George says.

Clay smiles at him. "You can call me whatever you want."

"Okay then, *Dream*," George teases. He tilts his head. "What do you wanna do tonight?"

"I don't know," he says, shrugging. "I was kind of hoping that we could maybe just... talk."

George raises an eyebrow. "Talk?"

"Yeah," Dream tells him. He shifts from foot to foot on top of the ice. "Like... I don't know. I still feel stupid about everything sometimes. I wish I didn't do all that."

George softens, leans in for a kiss to shut him up, and presses the curve of his palm against the slope of Dream's cheek. "It wasn't stupid," George says. When Dream levels a look at him, he stifles a laugh. "Okay, yeah. Maybe it was a little bit stupid. But I think you were just... afraid."

"Afraid of other people," Dream continues for him. "Afraid of myself."

"Yeah," George breathes. He runs his thumb underneath the bags under Dream's eyes, the freckles that never fade, not even in harsh winters like these. He takes a breath. "But it's okay. Things are different now."

Dream's lips stretch into a slow, blinding grin. "Different in a good way, I hope."

George scoffs. "Obviously," he says. He pulls away, and the smile on his face turns into something confident, something more challenging. "Race you to the other side of the rink?"

"You're *on*," Dream tells him, cackling, but George has already started skating away.

They're laughing as they zip across the ice, and they're laughing when they crash into each other and fall against the plexiglass. It feels familiar. It feels like a home away from home.

George thinks that moving across the world is the best thing that's ever happened to him.

Chapter End Notes

after 54k words and a year and a half, it's finally over :')

i started this fic in december of 2020 stuck at home during lockdown and i had no idea that it would lead me here today, and for that, i am truly truly grateful. i've made so many friends and memories since then and i owe it all to this fic. thank u sooo much for everyone who read or left a kudos or commented or did anything to encourage me, and an extra big thank you to those of u who stuck around even after i put this on hiatus. i really do appreciate u guys <3 it's been a crazy ride

i did my best to match the newer chapters to the original outline and vision i had back then, but i think i've grown a lot as a person and as a writer ever since so please do check out my other works if you're interested ! head or heart is my pride and joy, my dnf week 2022 fics are fun and cute and fluffy, and crest and trough is another college sports au but with extra angst

check out all the lovely fanart of this fic:

[art by westywallowing](#)

[art by 400 badrequest](#)

please do tag me if you draw anything else i'd love to see it!!

[twitter](#)

[tumblr](#)

lots of love,
effy

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!